Suffering, Servitude, Power:

Eco-Critical and Eco-Theological Readings of the Exeter Book Riddles

by

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Corinne Dale, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: C Dale -

Date: 05/06/2015

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Abstract

Humanity is a dominant presence in the Exeter Book riddle collection, significantly more so than it is in other early English riddle collections, and it is shown actively shaping, changing, and interacting with the physical world. The Exeter Book riddles engage with issues of exploitation, degradation and suffering and use their playful literary context to portray and, at times, reassess the roles of mastery and servitude that humans and nature have assumed in the post-lapsarian world.

In this thesis, I set out to explore the depiction of the non-human world in the Exeter Book Riddle collection, investigating humanity's interaction with, and attitudes towards, the rest of creation using the fields of eco-criticism and eco-theology. Much scholarly attention has been given to what the riddles have to say about human society and culture, about heroism, service, sex and war, but very little has been said regarding the point-of-view of the natural world. I argue that there is a programme of resistance to anthropocentrism at work in the Exeter Book Riddle collection, whereby the riddles challenge human-centred ways of depicting and interpreting the created world. Depictions of the marginalised perspectives of sentient and non-sentient beings such as trees and animals are not just a characteristic of the riddle genre, but are actively used to explore the point of view of the natural world and the impact humanity has on its non-human inhabitants.

Abbreviations

ASLE	Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment
ASPR	Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records
BBA	*Bonner Beiträge zur Anglistik*
Brn	*The Battle of Brunanburh*
BudV	*Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Königlich Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig*
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
EETS	Early English Text Society
FoM	*The Fortunes of Men*
FoA	*The Fates of the Apostles*
GA	*Guthlac A*
Gen A	*Genesis A*
ISLE	Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment
JEGP	*The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
MLN	*Modern Language Notes*
Mx I	*Maxims I*
Mx II	*Maxims II*
NKJB	New King James Bible
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
Phx	*The Phoenix*
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*
R.	Riddle
Rgn	*Resignation*
DR	*The Dream of the Rood*
Rn	*The Ruin*
Sfr	*The Seafarer*
S & B II	*Soul and Body II*
Vgl	*Vainglory*
Wan	*The Wanderer*
WL	*The Wife's Lament*

Introduction

In a 2009 article on ecopoetry and the Old English elegies, Matt Low states plainly that 'Medieval studies could do more to embrace the growing theoretical field of ecocriticism'.[1] 'In studies of Medieval texts,' says Low, 'particularly those written in Old English during the Anglo-Saxon period, little effort has been made to explore the natural world beyond its function as setting or symbol'.[2] Low is absolutely right to draw our attention to this problem and to address it with his own eco-critical reading of the Exeter Book elegies. Whilst efforts have been made to produce green readings of late medieval texts,[3] the natural world as an entity in itself has been, until very recently, overlooked in scholarship on Old English texts.[4] 'The abundance of historical,

[1] Matt Low, '"Heard gripe hruson" (The hard grip of the earth): Ecopoetry and the Anglo-Saxon Elegy', *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 42 (2009), 1-18 (p. 1).
[2] *Ibid*., p. 1.
[3] See, for example, Rebecca M. Douglass, 'Ecocriticism and Middle English Literature', in *Studies in Medievalism X: Medievalism and the Academy II: Cultural Studies* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 136-63; Gillian Rudd, *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Lisa J. Kiser, 'Chaucer and the Politics of Nature', *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, ed. by Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), pp. 41-56; and Sarah Stanbury, 'EcoChaucer: Green Ethics and Medieval Nature', *Chaucer Review*, 39 (2004), 1-16.
[4] Helen Price is one of the newly emerging Anglo-Saxon eco-critics. See her unpublished MA dissertation 'Nature Speaks: Expanding Ecocriticism to the Anglo-Saxon World' (2010) and her unpublished PhD thesis 'Human and Nonhuman in Anglo-Saxon and British Postwar Poetry: Reshaping Literary Ecology' (2013), both completed at the University of Leeds.

religious, and linguistic material in Anglo-Saxon texts has dominated most medieval discourses,' says Low, and thus the 'nature-centred characteristics of certain Anglo-Saxon texts have largely been bypassed'.[5] Low's observation is especially true of the Old English riddles,[6] where much scholarly attention has been given to what the riddles might have to say about Anglo-Saxon society and culture, including service, sex, social relationships, war and heroism.[7] With eco-criticism being an ever expanding field, especially in medieval studies, it is time to turn our attention more fully to the depiction of the natural world in the Exeter Book riddles.[8]

In his eco-critical article, Low focuses his attention on the natural world in the Old English elegies, yet, in many ways, it is the Old English riddles that more readily

[5] Low, p. 1.

[6] I refer to the ninety-five riddles included in the second half of the manuscript known as 'the Exeter Book' (Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501, folios 101r-115r and 124v-130v). All citations from the Old English riddles are from Craig Williamson, *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977). I use Williamson's edition for the same reasons Patrick Murphy offers in *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2011), p. 2 (n. 6). Whilst citations are from Williamson's edition, I use the ASPR numbering of the riddles, since this is the more conventional system used by critics. Unless stated otherwise, all translations from Old English to modern English, including those texts outside of the riddle collection, are my own. All references to Old English poetry other than the riddles will be taken from the ASPR, unless otherwise noted.

[7] For 'service', see, for example, Jennifer Neville, 'The Unexpected Treasure of the "Implement Trope": Hierarchical Relationships in the Old English Riddles', *The Review of English Studies*, n.s., 62 (2011), 505-19; and Neville 'Speaking the Unspeakable: Appetite for Deconstruction in Exeter Book Riddle 12', *English Studies*, 93 (2012), 519-28. There are many different articles on 'sex' or 'relationships'; see, for example, Mercedes Salvador Bello, 'The Key to the Body: Unlocking Riddles 42-46', in *Naked Before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Benjamin C. Withers and Jonathan Wilcox (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003), pp. 60-96; Nina Rulon-Miller, 'Sexual Humor and Fettered Desire in Exeter Book Riddle 12', in *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. by Jonathan Wilcox (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2000), pp. 99-126; and Melanie Heyworth, 'Perceptions of Marriage in Exeter Book Riddles 20 and 61', *Studia Neophilologica*, 79, (2007), 171-84. For 'war' and 'heroism' see, for example, Eric Gerald Stanley, 'Heroic Aspects of the Exeter Book Riddles', in *Prosody and Poetics in the Early Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of C. B. Hieatt*, ed. by M. J. Toswell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 197-218; John Tanke, 'The Batchelor-Warrior of Exeter Book Riddle 20', *Philological Quarterly*, 79 (2000), 409-27; and Edward B. Irving jr., 'Heroic Experience in the Old English Riddles', in *Old English Shorter Poems*, ed. by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (New York: Garland, 1994), pp. 199-212.

[8] I follow Neville's definitions of the natural world as outlined in *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry*, CSASE, 27 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1-3. Neville argues that the modern concept of the natural world as 'all that is external to humanity' is applicable to Old English poetry, but says that Anglo-Saxon concepts of the natural world, unlike modern concepts, did not exclude the supernatural (pp. 2-3).

invite an eco-critical reading. As playful enigmas,[9] the riddles often depict their subjects from a first person perspective, lending voices to non-human entities, or else enable writers to imagine non-human beings from a point of view different to their own. The Exeter Book riddles show a tree, an ox, ore and water, to name but a few entities, living, growing, dying or being reshaped in the created world. As part of his argument for 'more rigorous attention' to the natural world in the elegies, Low reasons that 'the authors of these earliest of English texts lived, wrote, and interacted daily, just as we do today, with a concrete, physical environment';[10] with their various descriptions of humans using, shaping and transforming aspects of the natural world, the Exeter Book riddles are particularly provocative examples of humanity 'interact[ing] daily' with a physical environment. With a few exceptions, the riddles are, to quote Frederick Tupper, 'very close to solid earth'.[11] The larger number, Tupper says, in his 1910 edition of the Riddles,

> is devoted to man and his works: his weapons, his implements of home and field, his clothes, many of his instruments of music, his books and script, his sacred emblems, and even his food and drink. Not only man, but the lower animals, fish, flesh, and fowl, receive ample treatment.[12]

The Exeter Book riddles, with their vivid narratives and descriptions, frequently dramatise how humans interact with the natural world. In 1914, Stopford A. Brooke marvelled that the riddle collection contains 'so much deliberate nature-poetry, written

[9] For a discussion of the history of identifying, labelling and characterising the riddles, and for his own discussion of the riddles' character and design, see Murphy, pp. 27-37. Wyatt's description of the riddles in his 1912 edition of the collection is still one of the most pertinent: 'The riddles…are not riddles in the modern sense of the word, but enigmas, descriptions of an object which are intended to be at once accurate and misleading: the more misleadingly accurate and accurately misleading, the better'. See Wyatt, ed., *Old English Riddles* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1912), p. xxviii.

[10] Low, p. 1.

[11] Frederick Tupper, *The Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Boston: Ginn, 1910), p. lxxxvi.

[12] *Ibid*., pp. lxxxvi-ii.

for the sake of nature alone, and with an evident and observing love';[13] what the collection presents, however, is not so much nature poetry, written for nature's sake – a form of early romanticism as it were – as an ethics of human-nature interaction.[14]

Brooke's description of the riddles as 'nature-poetry…written with an evident and observing love' is perhaps better suited to Aldhelm's riddles, whose author, it has been argued, describes the created world with all the care and attention of a naturalist.[15] A brief comparison of the subject matter of the Exeter Book riddles to the subject matter of Aldhelm's riddle collection can help us appreciate this difference in the treatment of nature.[16] As the table overleaf illustrates, Aldhelm's collection is populated by a great deal of flora and fauna, whilst the Exeter Book collection is populated with more man-made creations than creations of God.[17]

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[13] Stopford A. Brooke, *English Literature from the Beginning to the Norman Conquest* (London: Macmillan, 1914), p. 96.

[14] To be discussed in more detail later in this introduction.

[15] Malcolm Laurence Cameron, 'Aldhelm as Naturalist: A Re-examination of Some of his Enigmata', *Peritia*, 4 (1985), 117-33.

[16] For studies on the relationship between Aldhelm's enigmas and the Exeter Book riddles see Williamson, *Riddles*, pp. 20 and 24, and *A Feast of Creatures: Anglo-Saxon Riddle Songs* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), pp. 7-11; D. G. Calder and M. J. B. Allen, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: The Major Latin Texts in Translation* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1976), p. 162 (see pages 163-74 for the proposed sources and analogues); Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'The Text of Aldhelm's *Enigma* No. C. in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson C.697 and Exeter Riddle 40', *ASE*, 14 (1985), 61-73; Michael Lapidge, 'The Comparative Approach', in *Reading Old English Texts*, ed. by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 20-38 (pp. 29-30); Janie Steen, *Verse and Virtuosity: The Adaptation of Latin Rhetoric in Old English Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), especially Chapter Five 'Through the Looking Glass: Riddles 35 ad 40' (pp. 89-109); Andy Orchard, 'Enigma Variations: The Anglo-Saxon Riddle Tradition', in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, vol. 1, ed. by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe and Andy Orchard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 284-304; and Dieter Bitterli, *Say What I Am Called: The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book and the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009). See also my discussion of the ox riddle genre in Chapter 2.

[17] I have compiled this table using the answers provided in *The Riddles of Aldhelm: Text and Verse Translation with Notes*, ed. and trans. by James Hall Pitman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1925; repr. North Haven, CT: Archon Book, 1970). Categorising Aldhelm's riddles is a relatively simple task, since we are dealing with 'fixed' answers that were often circulated with the manuscript. We have no record of answers to the Exeter Book riddles and so, for ease of consolidation, I use the answers suggested by Williamson in *Riddles*. Any answers deemed 'uncertain' by Williamson are included under 'other', along with natural and cosmic phenomena (e.g. storms, constellations, icebergs and water) which, as less tangible or otherwise elemental aspects of the created world, ought to be treated separately from plants and animals. For a discussion of the circulation of answers with early riddle manuscripts, including Aldhelm's *Enigmata*, see Orchard, 'Enigma Variations', pp. 285-89. See also Nicholas Howe, 'Aldhelm's Enigmata and Isidorian Etymology', *ASE*, 14 (1985), 37-59.

	Aldhelm's *Enigmata*	Exeter Book Riddles
Flora and fauna	50	20
Human creations	24	49
Other	26	22

In the Exeter Book collection, the biggest category is human creations, the total being 49, whilst the total in Aldhelm's collection is just 24. We might be tempted to say here that Aldhelm appears to be more interested in the natural world than the Exeter Book riddle author(s), with the *Enigmata* containing over double the amount of riddles based on plants and animals than the Old English collection. Such an assertion, however, is unwise. Aldhelm may show the careful attention to nature of a naturalist, drawing on Pliny, Isidore and 'his own observation of nature' to describe his subjects,[18] but the Exeter Book riddles offer their own unique view of the natural world, being equally, if not more, interested in the natural material of their human creations as with the human creations themselves. The riddles show a particular interest in embodied materiality, in how the organic becomes an object, often grounding their subjects in the natural world. Riddle 73, for instance, does not depict merely a bow, but the bow's origins as a tree that once flourished in a wood:

> Ic on wonge aweox, wunode þær mec feddon
> hruse ond heofonwolcn, oþþæt me onhwyrfdon,
> gearum frodne, þa me grome wurdon,
> of þære gecynde þe ic ær cwic beheold,
> onwendan mine wisan, wegedon mec of earde,

[18] Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600-899* (London: Hambledon, 1996), p. 9.

gedydon þæt ic sceolde wiþ gesceape minum
on bonan willan bugan hwilum.
(R. 73, 1a-7b)[19]

Rather than merely describing the shape and nature of the object, the riddle-writer considers the object's natural beginnings, its original form, before it enters the hands of humans. This is true of other Exeter Book riddles, too; an inkwell was once an antler (R. 88 and 93), mead was once nectar (R. 27), chainmail and money were once ore in the ground (R. 35 and 83).

But as well as an interest in materiality, the riddles also show a degree of sympathy towards, or concern for, the natural world and its use by humans. One cannot read Riddle 72, for example, without detecting concern for the suffering of the harnessed ox:

bunden under beame, beag hæfde on healse,
wean on laste weorc þrowade,
earfoða dæl.
(R. 72, 13a-14b)[20]

It is difficult, too, to read the following lines from Riddle 83 and not notice anxiety about humanity's use of earth's materials:

Nu me fah warað
eorþan broþor, se me ærest wearð
gumena to gyrne. Ic ful gearwe gemon
hwa min fromcynn fruman agette
eall of earde;
(R. 83, 4b-8a)[21]

[19] 'I grew in a field, dwelt where earth and heaven-cloud fed me, until those who were grim against me turned me, old in years, out of the quality that I previously held when living, changed my condition, bore me out of my native land, made it so that at times I must, against my nature, bend to a killer's will.'
[20] 'bound under beam, I had a ring round my neck; in the track of sorrow, [I] endured suffering, a load of hardships.'
[21] 'Now the hostile one, earth's brother, holds me, he who first brought about my affliction among men. I remember very well who drained all my ancestry out of its land.'

A certain number of the riddles describe a creature's service to humans, like Riddle 72, which depicts an ox under the control of the *sweartum hyrde* 'dark herdsman' (R. 72, 10a). Humanity is nearly always the master in the human-nature relationship and it is sometimes depicted as an enemy that causes the degradation or suffering of earth's non-human inhabitants.[22] In riddles such as 72 and 73, a subject is taken out of an idyllic natural setting and wounded or killed by humans. Certain riddles construct narratives which contrast a subject's happy past with an unhappy present, resulting, in some cases, with a feeling of nostalgia for a lost Edenic world. Such a feeling is not found in Aldhelm's *Enigmata.*[23]

In this thesis, I set out to explore the depiction of the natural world in the Exeter Book Riddle collection, investigating humanity's interaction with, and attitudes towards, the rest of creation. I argue that there is a programme of resistance to anthropocentrism at work in the Exeter Book Riddle collection, whereby the riddles challenge human-centred ways of depicting the created world. One way to read the riddles, and indeed the way most privileged by critics, is as Tupper reads them, as extensively interested in, and dominated by, humanity:

> All these riddles, whether the subject be animate or inanimate, have at least one common characteristic, their human interest. This is evinced in a dozen striking ways: but by far the most important of these is a trait of our problems, missing in other collections, but so strongly marked here as to suggest a common origin for many of the riddles – the trait of utility. The riddler may neglect place and form, and color of his subject, but he constantly stresses its uses to mankind. Indeed, men are in the background of every riddle-picture; and the subject is usually viewed in relation to them. The most significant expression of this relation is found in the motif of

[22] Riddles that depict humans as masters (or lord) are Riddles 4, 20, 21, 23, 49, 50, 52, 54, 58, 62, 71, 73, 80 and 91. Riddles that depict humanity as enemy, or as the source of the subject's suffering, are Riddles 5, 23, 26, 52, 53, 56, 71, 72, 73, 77, 83, 91 and 93.

[23] All these aspects of the riddles, materiality, mastery, sympathy and nostalgia, will be discussed in more detail later in this thesis.

> Comitatus, or personal service of an underling to his lord and master, that forms the dominant idea in many of our poems.[24]

There is, however, another, less anthropocentric, way to read the riddles. Whilst it is true that the riddles depict 'man and his works',[25] often remarking on their subjects' usefulness to humans,[26] or else using the familiar human world as a point of orientation within a vast, overwhelming cosmos, the riddles also offer an alternative, eco-centric view of their subjects, one that considers the natural origins of manmade products and the individual integrity and personal plight of these useful human resources. The creation of a Bible (R. 26), for example, devotes attention to the animal as well as the human element of the making process, refocusing the traditional anthropocentric nature of a colophon which records the human contribution to the book's creation. Similarly, the tree riddles (R. 53 and 73) focus on the integrity of the material itself, inverting the importance placed on the literal and figurative 'end product' in theology by disrupting the reader's ability to confidently identify the subject. The riddles also challenge humanity's belief in its own knowledge, and reveal mysterious parts of the world to which humans have never been and cannot fully comprehend – the storm of Riddle 2, for example, travels to subterranean places that humans do not know and asks its reader to contemplate more than just its identity.[27] The riddles also use their playful literary form to portray and, at times, reassess the roles of mastery and

[24] Tupper, *Riddles,* p. lxxxviii.
[25] *Ibid*., pp. lxxxvi-ii.
[26] There are various riddles that describe how useful or precious their subjects are to humans. R. 17's subject is *wloncum deore* 'dear to warriors' (R. 17, 10b), whilst R. 20's is *frean minum leof* 'dear to [its] lord' (R. 20, 2a). R. 25's is described as *neahbuendum nyt* 'useful to those dwelling nearby' (R. 25, 2b), whilst R. 26's is *niþum to nytte* 'useful to humans' (R. 25, 27a) and R. 27's subject is *weorð werum* 'valuable to men' (R. 27, 1a). Others include R. 32 (9b), R. 34 (3a), R. 35 (12a-b), R. 41 (6a-7b), R. 49 (9b-10a), R. 50 (2a), R. 54 (7b-8a, 11b-12a), R. 58 (5b), R. 70 (6b) and R. 84 (28a-b).
[27] *Saga, þoncol mon, / hwa mec bregde of brimes fæþum* 'say, wise man, who draws me from the sea's embrace' (R. 2, 12b-13b).

servitude that humanity and nature have assumed in the post-lapsarian world; non-humans, like the ox (R. 72), are under human control, but subjects can resist human mastery, like the nectar of Riddle 27 which, when transformed, has the power to control its human user.[28]

Servitude, mastery, exploitation, suffering, knowledge – for the Exeter Book riddles, all these avenues of exploration derive from theological sources, including various Biblical narratives and exegeses. One of the main sources is Genesis, with its narrative of the Fall and its attendant notion that, after the Fall, the relationship between humanity and the natural world became one of mastery and exploitation, as opposed to the relationship of care and custodianship that characterised the pre-lapsarian world.[29] Another key source, and a text I discuss in Chapters 5 and 7, is The Book of Job, the Old Testament wisdom poem in which God questions Job about the nature of the created world and challenges his belief in his own wisdom. Other sources include the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, as well as various patristic Biblical commentaries. These include St. Ambrose's commentary on the Hexameron, discussed primarily in Chapter 2, and various commentaries and exegeses by St. Augustine, including his *Confessiones*, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* and *In epistolam*

[28] These various aspects of the riddles form the basis of this study's chapters and are discussed in more detail in the Overview of Thesis section of this introduction.

[29] Unless stated otherwise, all references to the Bible are to the Latin Vulgate, for which I use *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, ed. by Alberto Colunga and Laurentio Turrado, 7th edn (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Christianos, 1985). All translations of the Vulgate are from *The Holy Bible: Translated from the Latin Vulgate* (New York: Douay Bible House, 1953). I have chosen the Colunga-Turrado edition of the Bible because it is closest to the version used in Anglo-Saxon England. For an overview of the complex nature of manuscript transmission in the Anglo-Saxon period see Richard Marsden, 'Wrestling with the Bible: Textual Problems for the Scholar and Student', in *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England: Approaches to Current Scholarship and Teaching*, ed. by Paul Cavill (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), pp. 69-90. See also Marsden, 'The Biblical Manuscripts of Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume 1: c. 400–1100*, ed. by Richard Marsden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 406-35. For a discussion of the transmission of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England see Marsden, *The Text of the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon England*, CSASE, 15 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Ioannis. In order to understand the depictions of the natural world in the collection, we must necessarily turn to theology; theology had a greater impact on how humans saw the world and their role in it than it does today. As Ruth Wehlau observes, 'Old English poetry represents the cosmos not as Nature, but as Creation, not as organism, but as artifice'.[30] For this reason, my thesis is an eco-critical *and* eco-theological reading of the Exeter Book riddles. It considers attitudes to nature, but also how these attitudes are shaped by religious beliefs. It is for this reason, too, that I discuss nature as a created world, as a product of God's craftsmanship, as opposed to what might otherwise be considered, to quote Neville, 'a straightforward and basic entity'.[31]

Eco-Criticism and Eco-Theology

Eco-criticism and eco-theology are fields which work to recover the importance of the natural world in literature and theology respectively; eco-criticism, perhaps the more familiar of these fields to literary scholars, essentially takes an 'earth-centred' approach to literary texts, whilst eco-theology takes an 'earth-centred' approach to the Bible; both read texts for what they say about the non-human world. In 2006, Ursula K. Heise called eco-criticism a 'rapidly growing field in literary studies',[32] and the field can be described in the same way almost a decade later. Eco-criticism is quite simply, to quote Cheryl Glotfelty, editor of *The Ecocriticism Reader*, 'the study of the

[30] Ruth Wehlau, *"The Riddle of Creation": Metaphor Structures in Old English Poetry* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 8.
[31] Neville, *Representations*, p. 2.
[32] Ursula K. Heise, 'A Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism', *PMLA*, 121 (2006), 503-16 (p. 504). Heise offers a useful, comprehensive overview of the development of eco-criticism (pp. 503-6). For another comprehensive overview see Cheryl Glotfelty, 'Introduction: Literary Studies in an Environmental Crisis', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996). For a more recent overview of the development of eco-criticism and discussions of the field's key areas of investigation see Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2011).

relationship between literature and the environment'.[33] The field, says Glotfelty, 'takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture', and as a theoretical discourse, 'negotiates between the human and the non-human'.[34] It is a diverse field – a diversity that can be testified by a brief survey of the ASLE programmes from 1995-2013.[35] In summarising the nature of eco-criticism, Glotfelty offers a series of questions eco-critics might ask of a text or of the field in general, including:

> How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? In addition to race, class, and gender, should place become a new critical category?[36]

The list goes on, but the first six questions Glotfelty offers are enough to give a sense of what eco-critics are looking for and the diversity of the questions they might ask. As well as asking these types of questions, eco-critics also look for certain characteristics or underlying principles that can identify a text as 'green', or as having green tendencies. In his influential 1995 publication, Lawrence Buell argues that an eco-centric text typically contains one or more of the following characteristics:

> 1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.
> 2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.
> 3. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation.

[33] Glotfelty, p. xviii.
[34] *Ibid*., p. xix.
[35] ASLE, a biennial conference held at Colorado State University, is perhaps the biggest and longest running conference aimed at promoting environmental literary studies. The programmes can be found in the ASLE Archive at <http://www.asle.org/conference/biennial-conference/archive/> [accessed 31/03/2015].
[36] Glotfelty, pp. xviii-xix.

4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text.[37]

A 'green' text might include one, some, or all of the above characteristics in a variety of combinations. As Buell says, 'few works fail to qualify at least marginally, but few qualify unequivocally and consistently'.[38] It is the task of the discerning critic to decide the extent to which an individual or group of texts is green.

Like eco-criticism, eco-theology is a growing field of research. It has been established for a number of decades – indeed, it has been 'greening', to borrow Glotfelty's term, since the 1970s, two decades before eco-literary studies[39] – but is now enjoying increasing scholarly interest. Whilst eco-criticism has cross-pollinated various disciplines,[40] however, eco-theology remains somewhat exclusive to the realms of theology; to my knowledge, its theories are largely, if not entirely, applied to the scriptures, with literary scholars failing to draw on its principles.[41] This is regrettable, since eco-theology has a lot to offer literary studies, particularly studies of those texts with strong theological underpinnings, like those collected in the Exeter Book. Even in later medieval texts, where depictions of the natural world are often governed by classical culture, the principles may still be of use.[42]

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[37] Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 7-8. The endurance of Buell's principles is testified by their use in more recent eco-critical studies, including Alfred K. Siewers's *Strange Beauty: Ecocritical Approaches to Early Medieval Landscape*, The New Middle Ages (London: Palgrave, 2009), p. 25. See also Rudd, *Greenery*, pp. 10, 147, 150, 163 and 155-6.

[38] Buell, p. 8.

[39] Glotfelty, 'Introduction', p. xvi.

[40] For an overview of work undertaken in various fields of study see Howarth, pp. 82-7, and Glotfelty, 'Introduction', p. xxi-xxii.

[41] One of the questions eco-criticism asks is 'what cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history and ethics?' (Glotfelty, 'Introduction', p. xix) – there is no mention of theology in this list, and Glotfelty mentions theology later only in passing (p. xxii). In contrast, eco-theologians have acknowledge the value of eco-criticism to the study of Biblical scholarship. See Timothy J. Burbery, 'Ecocriticism and Christian Literary Scholarship', *Christianity and Literature,* 61 (2012), 189-214.

[42] See my discussion of Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale* and the eco-theological principle of resistance in Chapter 6.

Eco-criticism has been described as having a 'triple alliance' to science, culture and politics,[43] and has also been described as an 'activist' response to our current ecological crisis.[44] Like eco-criticism, eco-theology is, in part, a response to recent degradation of the earth; it is, says Peter Manly Scott, 'a style of theoretical enquiry which responds to environmental or ecological concerns'.[45] As the editors of *The Green Bible* explain:

> The household of our planet…is coming apart as deforestation, the loss of topsoil, the rapid extinction of plant and animal species, the pollution of our air and water, and global warming all demonstrate.
>
> Recently, many persons and institutions rooted in the Judeo-Christian heritage have awakened to the ecological crisis, and have begun to make a connection between their faith and the fate of the earth. Plumbing the depths of their biblical and theoretical heritage, and learning from personal improvement in environmental efforts, they are fashioning a new faith, one informed by a reverence for life.[46]

Modern theologians draw on the Bible for new and better ways of interacting with the natural world.[47] It is the eco-theologian's view that, as a 'redeemed people', Christians 'can act to heal the world of sin through acts of love and care for one another and for the non-human world'.[48] But eco-theology is also a response to the argument that

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[43] Heise, p. 506.

[44] See Simon C. Estok, 'Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia', *ISLE*, 16 (2009), 203-225 (p. 205). For a useful, in-depth discussion of the current ecological problems being faced in the 21st century see Celia Deane-Drummond, *Ecotheology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008), pp. 18-37.

[45] Peter Manly Scott, 'Which Nature? Whose Justice? Shifting Meanings of Nature in Recent Ecotheology', in *God's Bounty?: The Churches and the Natural World*, ed. by Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), pp. 431-57 (p. 431).

[46] Stephen Bede Scharper and Hilary Cunningham, *The Green Bible* (New York: Lantern, 2002), p. xiv.

[47] Other key studies that explore both the 'green' potential of the Bible and contemporary criticisms of its anti-environmetal philosophies include: Philip N. Joranson, *Cry of the Environment: Rebuilding the Christian Creation Tradition* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear, 1984); Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1985); and Adrian Michael Hough, *God is Not 'Green': A Re-examination of Eco-theology* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1997).

[48] Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 127.

Christianity must take a large portion of the blame for the ecological crisis. The origins of the argument can be traced to Lynn White's 'bombshell'[49] article, published in 1967, in which White asserts that environmental exploitation is, at least partly, a 'realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature'.[50] This belief has its roots in the Genesis narrative, in which God gives Adam dominion over the natural world and the authority to name every species of animal (Genesis, 2.19-20). Being 'deeply troubled' by accusations that Christianity has led to an ecological crisis, theologians have 'delved into the tradition to reexamine, retrieve, reinterpret, and reform the texts and practices responsible for such devastation'.[51] Eco-theology, we might summarise, has two key agendas: to explore the non-human in the Bible with a view to improving the relationship between humans and nature, and to liberate Christianity from both its 'huge burden of guilt'[52] and its reputation as a highly anthropocentric religion.[53]

One of the leading areas of eco-theological research has been conducted by the Earth Bible Team, which has published five books dedicated to exploring the non-human world of the Bible, known as the Earth Bible series.[54] The Team acknowledges that past ways of reading the Bible reveal 'a strong tendency to devalue Earth'[55] and recognises that these readings 'support attitudes and perspectives that contribute to

[49] A term used by Ernest L. Fortin in his eco-theological article, 'The Bible Made Me Do It: Christianity, Science, and the Environment', *The Review of Politics*, 57 (1995), 197-224 (p. 207).
[50] Lynn White, 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis', *Science*, 155 (1967), 1203-1207 (p. 1206).
[51] Anne Marie Dalton and Henry C. Simmons, *Ecotheology and the Practice of Hope* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), p. 53.
[52] White, p. 1206.
[53] *Ibid*., p. 1205.
[54] The five volumes of the Earth Bible Series, in order of publication, are: Norman C. Habel, ed., *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2000); Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst, eds, *The Earth Story in Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2000); Norman C. Habel, ed., *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2001); Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst, *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2001); Norman C. Habel and Vicky Balabanski, eds, *The Earth Story in the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 2002).
[55] Habel, *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, p. 25.

earth devaluation'.[56] The Team's five publications aim to generate new ways of interpreting the Bible and provide readings of the earth in various Biblical texts, from Genesis to wisdom literature and the New Testament. They invite readings from theologians that 'identify undercurrents from the perspective of the earth that challenge the dominant anthropocentric voices of the Biblical texts'.[57] In the first of their publications, the Team sets out what it calls 'six ecojustice principles', a set of principles by which a Biblical text can be interpreted and assessed for its level of attention to the non-human world. I list the principles in full below as I will be referring to them throughout this thesis:

1. *The Principle of Intrinsic Worth*
   The universe, Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value.
2. *The Principle of Interconnectedness*
   Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival.
3. *The Principle of Voice*
   Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.
4. *The Principle of Purpose*
   The universe, the Earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of the design.
5. *The principle of Mutual Custodianship*
   Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners, rather than rulers, to sustain a balanced and diverse Earth community.
6. *The Principle of Resistance*
   Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.[58]

[56] *Ibid*., p. 25.
[57] *Ibid.,* p. 33.
[58] The Earth Bible Team, 'Six Ecojustice Principles', in *Readings*, p. 24.

These principles, the only ones of their type to be put forward by the field of study, have been employed by various eco-theologians, including Celia Deane-Drummond, to whose work I also refer throughout this thesis.[59]

The principles of eco-theology, as set out by the Earth Bible Team, are similar to those of eco-criticism in the way they deal with the issues of human accountability and nature's intrinsic value; however, they differ in the way they are interested in how non-humans are associated with humanity in terms of custodianship and mastery and in how the natural world can resist injustices imposed by human beings. Eco-theology looks in particular (though not exclusively) at the strained relationship between humanity and nature as caused by the Fall, whereby humans, operating in a sinful, corrupt world, are perceived as an enemy to, or exploiter of, nature.

Eco-theology has much to offer the field of literary eco-criticism and medieval studies, opening up avenues of investigation that have hitherto been seldom explored. I draw on principles from both critical approaches in my thesis, sometimes forging links between principles from the two fields; for example, I find a connection between the eco-critical principle of accountability – the notion that 'human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation'[60] – and the eco-theological principles of custodianship and resistance. In an Anglo-Saxon context, accountability derives from Adam's original sin and the condemnation of nature to hardship and toil because of this sin; humans assumed a dominant role after the Fall, but the passive natural world is still able, at times, to resist control. The relationship between human accountability and Biblical notions of humanity's dominion over the rest of creation is a relationship that Buell, writing about post-modern nature poetry, does not consider.

[59] Deane-Drummond, *Ecotheology.* See especially pp. 77-84 for an insightful discussion and evaluation of the six principles.
[60] Buell, p. 7.

It is important to appreciate that the principles from both fields are not static but open to change and development depending on the texts being analysed. It is also important to recognise that a text, or group of texts, may not reflect all the principles of a certain field; the eco-critical characteristic of the 'environment as a process' and the eco-theological principle of 'interconnectedness', for example, are far less relevant to the Exeter Book riddles than other principles, such as accountability and voice. Likewise, principles that may be applicable to the riddles might not be applicable to later medieval texts.[61] after conducting my eco-critical and eco-theological analysis of the riddles, I will offer my own list of ecological principles that govern this group of texts, principles that synthesise the work of Buell and the Earth Bible Team but which also include some of my own suggestions.

Eco-Criticism and Eco-Theology: The Dangers

Like any critical theory, eco-criticism and eco-theology have their own methodological problems and discontents.[62] They also have their own agendas, which are, as I have discussed, often activist in nature.[63] An ecological agenda is something we must be aware of in the field of eco-theology, as Robert Kern explains:

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[61] For example, Stanbury argues that, for Chaucer, 'an "ethics of nature" would be unlikely to concern itself with the uses people make of the earth and its animal and botanical life'; Chaucer's version of nature, says Stanbury, 'demand[s] little from people in the way of ethical responsibility' (p. 12).

[62] For eco-criticism see, for example, Serpil Oppermann, 'Ecocriticism's Theoretical Discontents', *Mosaic*, 44 (2011), 153-69. Opperman discusses the 'contested issue' of literary theory in eco-critical studies (p. 153). See also Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), especially Chapter 4 'Art for Earth's Sake' (pp. 135-84). Here, Phillips also discusses the field's problematic polemic against theory, which eco-critics see as 'needlessly and pointlessly abstract' (p. 135). For eco-theology see Peet van Dyk, 'Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology', *Old Testament Essays*, 22 (2009), 186-204. Van Dyk paints a 'bleak picture' of the problems faced by theologians when reading the Bible from an ecological perspective and offers some pressing questions for further discussion (p. 200-01).

[63] See also Laurence Coupe, 'General Introduction', in *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. by Laurence Coupe (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1-8 (pp. 4-7). 'Green studies makes [sic] no sense,' says Coupe, 'unless its formulation of theory contributes to the struggle to preserve the "biotic community"' (p. 4).

> Ecocriticism…becomes reductive when it simply targets the environmentally incorrect, or when it aims to evaluate texts solely on the basis to their adherence to ecologically sanctioned standards of behaviour, as if one were to adopt, as a critical principle, Aldo Leopold's "land ethic", for example, and apply it to literature. […] Since the literary value of a text, however, depends on more than the ethical or ecological attitudes it expresses, to read literature in the light of such a [ecological] principle, we may feel, is precisely not to read it as literature, but as policy or doctrine, to be accepted or rejected out of hand.[64]

Using eco-criticism, and indeed eco-theology, successfully requires critics to avoid a heavy-handed or reductive approach; in some cases it also requires us to look for ways a text might resist any anthropocentric tendencies rather than to state that a text is categorically green. 'The arguments,' says Rudd, 'need to be led by what is in the individual texts themselves, with the aim of revealing what eco-criticism can bring to the fore that is usually either relegated to the background or simply overlooked altogether'.[65] When used appropriately, the eco-theological principles can, like the principles of eco-criticism, 'form a useful heuristic tool in order to uncover important facets in the Biblical text that would otherwise be ignored'.[66] A need to pay attention to what is in the 'individual texts themselves' is also required in the practice of eco-theology where theologians have a tendency to overstate the environmental aspects of what is an undeniably anthropocentric religion; 'to what extent,' asks Van Dyk, 'can anthropocentrism be avoided in the ecological debate without violating the anthropocentric view of the Bible?'[67]

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[64] Robert Kern, 'Ecocriticism: What is it Good For?', in *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003*, ed. by Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), pp. 258-81 (pp. 260-1).
[65] Rudd, p. 4.
[66] Deane-Drummond, p. 83.
[67] Van Dyk, p. 201. Or, as the Earth Bible Team says, 'the Bible has long been understood as God's book for humans. […] Should we not then, with a new ecological consciousness, legitimately suspect that the text and its interpreters have been understandably anthropocentric?' ('Guiding Ecojustice Principles', in *Readings*, p. 39).

In order to find historical support for sympathetic attitudes to the non-human world beyond the Bible, in Biblical exegeses for example, eco-theologians have hunted far and wide. This can, and has, led eco-theologians to rely on a small pool of sources – sources which are widely shared but not always reliable. A key example of this problem is the citation by theologians of a prayer that has been wrongly attributed to St. Basil of Caesarea. This prayer, quoted below from one such publication, asks for a renewed recognition of humanity's responsibility for living things:

> O God enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers the animals to whom thou has given the earth as their home in common with us. We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion of man with ruthless cruelty, so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to Thee in song, has been a groan of travail. May we realise that they live, not for us alone, but for themselves and for Thee, and that they love the sweetness of life.[68]

The compassion expressed in the passage has made it a popular quote for eco-theologians in recent years; it is difficult to find much sympathy in early Christian writings for the non-human world, and thus theologians have relied heavily on this passage as one of the earliest examples of concern for animals. The problem is that St. Basil is not the author of this prayer. There is no sign of the prayer in the Greek originals, as Philip Johnson has revealed in a recent series of blog articles,[69] and as I discovered when trying to track down the source material for this oft-quoted prayer, too. Regrettably, instead of referring to the original source, eco-theologians have been cross-quoting each other for many years, across a variety of publications; it is a case

[68] Citation from Richard D. Ryder, *Animal Revolution: Changing Attitudes Towards Speciesism* (London: Blackwell, 2000), p. 30.
[69] Philip Johnson, 'St. Basil's "Animal Prayers" are a "Hoax": Part 1' <http://animalsmattertogod.com/2012/05/04/st-basils-animal-prayers-are-a-hoax-part-one/> [Accessed 25/09/14].

of bad scholarly habits, a 'lapse in basic research techniques'.[70] Johnson lists a variety of publications that commit this crime, from prayer books to eco-theological studies, and my own research corroborates Johnson's findings.[71] Through his tireless endeavours, Johnson eventually traces the prayers to much later works by Charles Niven and C. W. Hume.[72]

'We cannot interrogate the past,' says Johnson, 'with the expectation that people in prior epochs should have thought like us or even that some of them actually did think like us about animals'.[73] This is a warning that needs to be heeded both in literary eco-criticism and eco-theology. For my own research, I am satisfied that there is ample evidence to show that the Anglo-Saxons and early Biblical commentators gave meaningful thought, if not overt sympathy, to the condition of the rest of creation post-Fall and to human relationships with the natural world; it is not my intention to hunt down sympathetic attitudes in the scriptures or Biblical exegeses where there are none. Early theologians were not activist in their considerations of the natural world as eco-theologians are today; but their attitudes to the non-human world are diverse and discernible, as Maureen A. Tilley explains:

> Some [early theologians] attribute intrinsic importance to animals, declaring all parts of creation to be of equal value. Others are more anthropocentric, insisting that humans, the rational animals, are of

[70] Johnson, 'Part 2'. <http://animalsmattertogod.com/2012/05/04/st-basils-animal-prayers-are-a-hoax-part-two/> [Accessed 25/09/14].
[71] See, for example, Michael W. Fox, *The Boundless Circle: Caring for Creatures and Creation* (Wheaton: Quest, 1996), p. 50; Antonia Lee Gorman, *The Blood of Goats and Bulls: An Eco-spiritual Response to the Sacrifice of Creation* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Drew University, 2008), p. 169; Jeremy A. Evans and Daniel Heimbach, *Taking Christian Moral Thought Seriously: The Legitimacy of Religious Beliefs in the Marketplace of Ideas* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2011); Evans and Heimbach cite Ryder, *Animal Revolution*, p. 51; Rod Preece, *Awe for the Tiger, Love for the Lamb: A Chronicle of Sensibility to Animals* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 77; Ben Lowe, *Green Revolution: Coming Together to Care for Creation* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p. 155. These are the main publications, but there are various others.
[72] Johnson, 'Part 6'. <http://animalsmattertogod.com/2012/05/04/st-basils-animal-prayers-are-a-hoax-part-six/> [Accessed 25/09/14].
[73] *Ibid*.

> greater importance and value, precisely because of rationality. Other animals are valuable because they serve humans beings. The earliest Christians had their own disagreements on this issue. They did not form environmental groups or put forth formal statements on ecology, but the stories they told about animals reveal how they might have addressed this twentieth-century problem.[74]

What also needs to be borne in mind here is that the Exeter Book riddles are part of a playful literary genre that depicts marginalised perspectives, and, as such, they often invert or suspend the norm in Anglo-Saxon and Biblical literature in order to explore the non-human world; like a Rabelaisian carnivalesque world, they offer 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order'.[75] The riddles reflect contemporary notions of the non-human world but also use their unique perspectives to develop these notions and explore those human-nature ethics that would otherwise remain unexplored.

'The major theological traditions,' observes Harry Hahne, 'focus on the communion of humans with God and minimise the importance of the natural world'.[76] Most depictions of the Fall in Old English poetry and its theological sources are anthropocentric and any references to the suffering of creation are made in passing, if made at all. For example, Neville says of the Old English Genesis that 'its aim is not to consider the character of the natural world either before or after the Fall';[77] rather, like other Old English texts, its primary focus is on the human condition. In contrast, I show that, though an interest in the non-human may not be typical in Old English or

[74] Maureen A. Tilley, 'Martyrs, Monks, Insects, and Animals', in *The Medieval World of Nature: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Joyce E. Salisbury (New York: Garland, 1992), p. 93.
[75] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 10. A fuller discussion of the relationship between Bakhtinian theory and the Exeter Book riddles can be found in Chapter 3.
[76] Harry Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Nature in Romans 8.19-22 and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 1.
[77] Neville, *Representations*, p. 20.

Biblical literature, it is typical in the playful, often subversive literary context of the Exeter Book riddles. There is no 'mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects'[78] in these texts.

Eco-criticism can sometimes be, to quote Robert Kern, 'a tendentious, adversarial enterprise'.[79] By marginalising 'those aspects and meanings of texts that are traditionally privileged or valorized' eco-critics are contesting with a vast amount of scholarship that is contrary to their own interpretations of a text. This is a problem recognised by Low in his eco-critical reading of the Old English elegies, who says that 'any study that aims to argue that the natural environments in Anglo-Saxon literature are more than symbols or rhetorical devices must first contend with the extensive criticism from medieval scholars that insinuates just the opposite'.[80] The problem is made all the more daunting by the fact that these scholars are often 'authoritative figures' whose work is highly influential.[81] When exploring the Exeter Book riddles, one faces a forbidding list of dominant anthropocentric readings of the texts by a range of authoritative scholars. The task, however, is to negotiate these readings, understand their reasoning, and seek alternative methods of understanding the texts' meanings in order to examine what is usually overlooked.

Whilst there are dangers and pitfalls in the use of eco-criticism and eco-theology, there are many benefits; both fields offer a plenitude of useful approaches, sage advice and well-established principles that can be applied to a vast array of literary texts. Both eco-criticism and eco-theology are responses to a modern ecological crisis, however, and thus we must remind ourselves that – however obvious it may seem – writers and readers of past texts would not have faced the same

[78] White, p. 1205.
[79] Kern, p. 260.
[80] Low, p. 2.
[81] *Ibid*., p. 2.

concerns as we do today. Most dangers and pitfalls can be overcome by paying close attention to the text under discussion and by not allowing a critical agenda to distort the text's meaning – a matter of staying true to the text whilst also drawing out what has previously been ignored by critics.

Negotiating Anthropocentrism

As I have noted, much scholarly attention has been given to what the riddles might have to say about Anglo-Saxon society or culture, whilst the natural world as an entity in itself has been side-lined or overlooked by critics hunting for allegorical or metaphorical interpretations of certain texts. Through this pursuit, a Bible made out of the skin of a slain animal is interpreted as a Christian martyr,[82] ore taken out of the earth is interpreted as a human being,[83] and a devastating storm is interpreted as a rampaging army.[84] To take the latter interpretation as a key example, Mitchell reads Riddle 1's depiction of a violent, wrathful force tearing down trees and burning homes as an attacking military force, supplying 'army' as the solution instead of the widely accepted solution 'storm'.[85] The consequences of reading a riddle as Mitchell does, as 'nothing whatever to do with nature',[86] is that nature becomes reduced to mere metaphor, and what the riddle might have to say about the non-human world is rejected in favour of an anthropocentric reading. This neglect of nature is made more lamentable when the double meaning proposed by the critic is not entirely convincing. It is true that a number of Riddle 1's clues correlate with the nature of an attacking

[82] See Bitterli, p. 178.
[83] See Marie Nelson, 'The Rhetoric of the Exeter Book Riddles', *Speculum*, 49 (1974), 421-40 (pp. 427-8).
[84] See Stephen A. Mitchell, 'Ambiguity and Germanic Imagery of OE Riddle 1: "Army"', *Studia Neophilologica*, 54 (1982), 39-52.
[85] The debate about the solution 'storm' and Riddle 1's relationship with the two subsequent riddles, 2 and 3, is a complex and ongoing one and will be discussed in Chapter 6.
[86] Mitchell, p. 41.

army, such as the the *wælcwealm wera* ‘slaughter of men’ (R. 1, 8a) and the fact that the subject is said to *folcsalo bærne* ‘burn the home’ and *ræced reafige* ‘ravage the hall’, yet the statement that an army is *holme gehrefed* ‘roofed with water’ (R. 1, 10a) and has *on hrycge* on [its] back’ *þæt ær hadas wreah foldbuendra, flæsc ond gæstas* ‘that which previously covered tribes, earthdwellers, flesh and spirits’ (R. 1, 12a-13b) is far less convincing; I cannot think of a situation in which an army would be roofed with water.

This is not to say that nature is not bound up in metaphor at all in the riddles; indeed, it is impossible for it not to be when metaphors form the basis of so many of the riddles’ narratives and the basis of the genre itself.[87] For example, Riddle 50 opens with a depiction of the solution, fire, as a warrior:

> Wiga is on eorþan wundrum acenned
> dryhtum to nytte, of dumbum twam
> torht atyhted, þone on teon wigeð
> feond his feonde. Forstrangne oft
> wif hine wrið. He him wel hereð,
> þeowaþ him geþwære, gif him þegniað
> mægeð ond mæcgas mid gemete ryhte,
> fedað hine fægre; he him fremum stepeð
> life on lissom. Leanað grimme
> þam þe hine wloncne weorþan læteð.
> (R. 50, 1a-9b)[88]

Fire, a natural phenomenon, gets entangled in a depiction of human relationships; that is, human relationships are used as a metaphor to explore the relationship between

[87] For a general discussion of the uses of metaphor in the Exeter Book riddles see Nigel F. Barley, ‘Structural Aspects of the Anglo-Saxon Riddle’, *Semiotica*, 10 (1974), 143-75 (especially pp. 144-149), and Archer Taylor, ‘The Riddle’, *California Folklore Quarterly*, 2 (1943), 129-47 (especially p. 129). See also Williamson, *Feast of Creatures*, pp. 3-4 and pp. 25-32, and Murphy, pp. 30-31 and 45-77.

[88] ‘There is a warrior on earth, born in wonder, profitable to men, produced, bright, from two dumb ones; an enemy carried him against an enemy in injury. Woman often fetters the very strong one. He obeys them well, serves them dutifully. If women and men serve him with proper measure and feed him fairly, he will improve their life with benefits and joys. He fiercely repays the one who lets him become proud.’

humans and fire. At the same time, the metaphor contains descriptions of the warrior that are not human-like.[89] For example, the warrior is of *dumbum twam / torht atyhted* 'produced, bright, from two dumb ones' (R. 50, 2b-3a). The depiction of the fire leads Jennifer Neville to argue that the riddle 'presents an opportunity to see not only 'fire' but also hierarchical relationships in an unexpected and provocative way' – that is, 'the revolutionary idea of a servant restraining the one who grants benefits and joys'.[90] It is difficult to determine whether the interest of the writer lies in the human relationships and the 'revolutionary' ideas its depiction entails, or whether it lies in the relationship between humans and fire and the notion that the natural world, in some instances, has the opportunity to fight back against human mastery. The answer to this quandary is twofold: firstly, a metaphor's meaning is open to individual interpretation and, as such, 'reflects as much on the interpreter as on the originator';[91] secondly, it is precisely the ambiguity, the complex relationship between duel meanings, that is the joy of metaphor and of riddles themselves.

Eco-criticism, says Robert Kern, 'depends upon our willingness as readers to marginalise, if not completely overlook, precisely those aspects and meanings of texts that are traditionally privileged or valorized',[92] and my reading of the riddles must necessarily do this at times in order to explore the depiction of, and attitudes towards, the non-human world. I follow the example of Gillian Rudd, who approaches late medieval texts with an attentiveness to metaphor and other literary devices whilst producing a green reading, as she explains:

[89] 'The first three lines of the riddle establish beyond doubt that this is no human warrior,' says Neville ('Unexpected Treasure', p. 518).
[90] *Ibid*., p. 518.
[91] Donald Davidson, 'What Metaphors Mean', in *On Metaphor,* ed. by Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 29.
[92] Kern, p. 267.

> the figurative use of the non-human world should [not] be set aside as irrelevant to green reading altogether. Human language is riddled with metaphor, simile and analogy, all of which combine to create an allegorical habit. The challenge must be to read with an awareness of allegory, while also focusing on the actual animals, plants, rocks or seas under debate. For literary critics it is not a case of either/or but of both-and.[93]

Like Rudd, it is my intention to be aware of metaphor and other literary devices at work in the riddles but to focus on what the riddles have to say about the created world as an entity in itself. Sometimes it is by considering the anthropocentric metaphors applied in the riddles that important attitudes to the natural world are revealed; a riddle's metaphorical layers, literal and allegorical, or the 'true premiss and the false premiss',[94] can be useful in shedding light on each other's meaning, not least attitudes to the non-human world.[95] 'A metaphor makes us attend to some likeness, often a novel or surprising likeness, between two or more things', says Donald Davidson,[96] and this is precisely what a large number of the riddles achieve. For Riddle 83 to use a narrative that describes the violent usurpation of the narrator from his native land as a metaphor for the removal of ore is to suggest the removal of ore is itself violent and unjust.

Throughout my thesis I also maintain an awareness of the effects of human culture and language on the depiction of the natural world, dealing, in part, with the

[93] Rudd, p. 11.
[94] Wim Tigges, 'Signs and Solutions: A Semiotic Approach to the Exeter Book Riddles', in *This Noble Craft...: Proceedings of the Xth Research Symposium of the Dutch and Belgian University Teachers of Old and Middle English and Historical Linguistics*, ed. by Erik Cooper, Costerus, 80 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), pp. 59-82 (p. 61).
[95] For a discussion of the relationship between a metaphorical riddle's two parts, the false solution and metaphorical description, see Archer Taylor, *The Literary Riddle Before 1600* (Los Angeles and Berkley: University of California Press, 1948), pp. 1-3.
[96] Davidson, p. 31. See Tigges, pp. 61-62, for a discussion of the use of binary typology in the Exeter Book riddles.

dominant view that 'culture will always master nature'.[97] For example, when I study the subject of Riddle 88, I acknowledge its echoes of a human familial feud,[98] but I also consider how the depiction of the subject's early life might resist an anthropocentric reading:

> Eard wæs þy weorðra þe wit on stodan,
> hyrstum þy hyrra. Ful oft unc holt wrugon,
> wudubeama helm wonnum nihtum,
> scildon wið scurum. Unc gescop meotud.
> Nu unc mæran twam magas uncre
> sculon æfter cuman, eard oðþringan
> gingran broþor.
>
> (R. 88, 11a-17a)[99]

It is difficult to separate nature and human culture, and we therefore tend to read this type of text as an assimilation of the non-human into the human world through language and culture. Writing about the anthropocentric nature of non-human representations, Lisa Sideris says

> In much of ecological theology and secular ethics, values in nature, and the ethical obligations such values generate, are articulated in language and categories that reflect human perspectives, capacities, and experiences. The assumption that individual animals in degraded environments experience a form of "oppression" fundamentally analogous to human experiences of oppression is one example; evaluative frameworks for determining the worth of non-human forms of life that rely on concepts of richness of experience, personhood, subjecthood, and capacities

[97] William Howarth, 'Some Principles of Ecocriticism', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 69-91 (p. 77).

[98] Bitterli offers a discussion of Riddle 88's human narrative and object personification (p. 155). He says, 'so consistent is the metaphorical disguise that the whole could indeed be taken as an account of human loss and displacement, and there is nothing in the text that would actually contradict such a reading' (p. 155).

[99] 'The native land was dearer where we two stood, the more sublime [for our] adornments. Very often the wood covered us, the roof of the forest trees shielded us from showers during the dark nights. The Creator shaped us. Now our two greater kinsmen, our younger brothers, shall come after us, seize our native land.'

> for pain and suffering likewise point to a human-centred perspective.'[100]

It is easy to see how the Exeter Book riddles fit this description; a part of the natural world (e.g. an antler or badger), suffers a very human experience of foreign invasion, usurpation or exile, reflecting the 'ever-present threat of violence and war'.[101] Yet such anthropomorphic practices can work in nature's favour; 'anthropomorphic practices,' says Nick Taylor, 'allow non-human animals agency and in turn this moves them from being object to being subject'.[102] By depicting nature as subject, the Exeter Book riddles interrogate what it means to be an object, 'an empty vessel filled with another's purpose and will'.[103]

It is also the case that authors will necessarily draw on what is familiar to them and their audience when writing about the non-human world. Just as language plays a 'crucial role […] in human sense-making', so too does culture.[104] In the instance of Riddle 88, the writer draws on what is familiar to the Anglo-Saxons, a narrative of usurpation from a native land, to depict something less familiar – an animal antler getting pushed out and replaced by another antler. Metaphor is a playful riddling technique, but it is also a way of familiarising ourselves with the rest of the world; metaphors 'mak[e] the familiar strange',[105] but they also make the strange familiar. Or, as Sarah Stanbury says, 'metaphor drawn from nature may even fulfil ecocriticism's mandate of unsettling the binary law that splits nature from culture, human from

[100] Lisa H. Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection: Suffering and Responsibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 168.
[101] Charles W. Kennedy, *The Earliest Old English Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), p. 134.
[102] Nick Taylor, 'Anthropomorphism and the Animal Subject', in *Anthropocentrism: Humans, Animals, Environments*, ed. by Rob Boddice (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 265-79 (p. 268).
[103] Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 46.
[104] Coupe, p. 2. See also, Terry Gifford, 'The Social Construction of Nature', *ISLE*, 3 (1996), 27-35.
[105] Wehlau, p. 11.

nonhuman'.[106] 'All writers […] are stuck with language,' says William Howarth, 'and although we cast *nature* and *culture* as opposites, in fact they constantly mingle, like water and soil in a flowing stream'.[107] Anthropomorphism is, and has been throughout history, 'unavoidable';[108] the task of an eco-critic is to look for ways in which the natural world might be assisted by anthropocentric practices, or else how the natural world might resist full assimilation, through language and culture, into the human world.

Overview of Thesis

This thesis progresses through the themes of place, labour, creation, transformation, accountability, mastery and wisdom, considering in each of the seven chapters how certain riddles contribute to the programme of resistance to anthropocentrism in the Exeter Book riddle collection. Chapter 1 focuses on the importance of place in the riddle collection and the way in which evocations of place can form part of the collection's ecological interests. Place theory is a growing field in Anglo-Saxon studies, yet the riddles' imagined environment has been lamentably unexplored; this is despite the fact that the riddle writers often depict a subject in terms of its dwelling place or describe the natural environment it grew up in before it entered the hands of humans. In this chapter I show how the riddles as a collection depict place as more than simply a setting or incidental backdrop, creating an environment which is integral to a number of the riddles' narratives. An interest in place, however, does not necessarily mean a text should be labelled as eco-centric or 'green', since depictions of place are often influenced by an anthropocentric point of view – place is, to quote Lawrence Buell,

[106] Stanbury, p. 7.
[107] Howarth, p. 69.
[108] N. Taylor, p. 265.

'perceived or felt space, space humanized'.[109] What I show is that, whilst the riddles typically depict place from an anthropocentric perspective, imagining the Anglo-Saxon hall as the centre of the depicted world, they also depict places that lie on the periphery, places less familiar to human beings. For example, Riddle 60 describes the subject's *anæde eard* 'solitary home' as a place that few men beheld (R. 60, 3b-5b) before relating how it later *ofer meodubence muðleas sprecan* 'speaks mouthless over the mead-bench' (R. 60, 9a-b). In its evocations of place, the riddle collection conjures up a feeling of nostalgia for an 'other world', a lost, Eden, which is far from the anthropocentric world of the hall. To explore this feeling of nostalgia, I also look in Chapter 1 at the Old English poem *The Phoenix* and compare and contrast its depiction of the unspoilt, unchanged, Paradise in which the phoenix dwells to the depiction of dwelling places in the riddles. I also draw on Melanie Heyworth's article on evocations of nostalgia in the Old English elegies in order to discuss the effect of the contrast between a riddle subject's happy past and its unhappy present.[110]

Chapter 2 expands on the concept of a lost Edenic past by exploring those riddles that depict the suffering of the non-human in the post-lapsarian world. I return to the theological notion that humanity can be as much an enemy to nature in the post-lapsarian world as nature can be to humanity and discuss the eco-theological principle that 'Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice'.[111] I discuss what is termed the 'groan of travail' in Biblical literature – the notion that the non-human world can, though voiceless, express its suffering as it toils in a shared servitude – and argue that Riddle 72 seems to echo this groan, with the ox voicing its suffering through the medium of poetry despite being silent. I argue that

[109] Buell, p. 253.
[110] Melanie Heyworth, 'Nostalgic Evocation and Social Privilege in the Old English Elegies', *Studia Neophilologica*, 76 (2004), 3-11.
[111] The Earth Bible Team, 'Six Ecojustice Principles', p. 24.

providing a voice to a creature does not necessarily humanize the non-human in this riddle but allows the ox to resist assimilation into the human world. This chapter also focuses on ox riddle 38 and explores how the Exeter Book riddle-writers develop their Latin riddle sources in order to depict oxen that are bound and controlled by humans. For example, where Aldhelm depicts an ox that has a large degree of agency, the writer of Riddle 72 depicts an ox bound, harnessed and driven on its way by a man. The chapter concludes with a reflection on two more possible ox riddles – Riddles 4 and 52 – with the intention of showing how the groan of travail can help us to clarify the identity of their subjects; I propose that R. 52 depicts two bound oxen and dispute Shannon Ferri Cochran's suggestion that Riddle 4 depicts an ox team.[112]

In Chapter 3, I consider the collection's resistance to anthropocentrism by examining Riddle 26's depiction of the Bible-making process. I argue that the riddle is a type of colophon, a record of a book's production history, that raises the animal and material elements of the Bible above its spiritual and human elements. That is, whilst the riddle acknowledges the work of the craftsman, it also promotes the book's animal origins and in doing so playfully inverts a colophon's anthropocentric focus on the human involvement in the making of the Bible. I develop this notion by thinking of the Bible-making process as the death of a creature and its afterlife in the material world, and draw on Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, a theory that has been discussed for its ecological underpinnings.[113] I consider how Bakhtin's concept of something 'high', 'spiritual' and 'abstract' being 'transfer[ed] to the material level'[114] resonates strongly with the narrative of Riddle 26, whereby a typically spiritual object begins its life as something distinctly material. The purpose of this comparison with

[112] Shannon Ferri Cochran, 'The Plough's the Thing: A New Solution to Old English Riddle 4 of the Exeter Book', *JEGP*, 108 (2009), 301-09.
[113] Examples of these studies will be given in Chapter 3.
[114] Bakhtin, p. 19.

carnivalesque theory is to demonstrate the riddle's interest in materiality; I show, with reference to other Old English riddles and the elegies, how the riddle writers are interested in the animal and how they draw our attention down to the earth.

Chapter 4 explores another transformation process in the riddle collection, namely, the transformation of a tree into an object to be used by human beings. Here, I return to the troubled relationship between humans and the rest of creation to show how the subjects of Riddles 53 and 73 are depicted in a post-lapsarian dystopia of suffering and corruption in which the relationship between humanity and nature is damaged. I emphasise the riddles' importance for what they reveal about early medieval attitudes towards the natural world and humanity's use of its materials, showing how the tree's initial wholeness, its intrinsic worth, is at odds with the importance placed on the 'end product' in early Christian thought. For example, the reader's quest for a solution to Riddle 53 is challenged through the text's depiction of the tree's early life and its refusal to allow the solver to find a satisfying answer. This emphasis on intrinsic worth mirrors the eco-theological principle that 'Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value'.[115] The chapter then moves into a consideration of fallen humanity's affiliation with the natural world through its spiritual status as 'unshaped' material, drawing on the tree's narrative in *The Dream of the Rood*'; the poem's afflicted and wounded dreamer, just like the felled tree, is 'material' in need of shaping.

In Chapter 5 I move on from the theme of transformation to focus on the issue of 'accountability' and the notion that humans are responsible for harming and exploiting the environment. I engage with a key characteristic of an environmental text,

[115] The Earth Bible Team, 'Six Ecojustice Principles', p. 24.

outlined by Buell, which is that 'human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation'.[116] I argue that this characteristic is manifested most strongly in Riddle 83, in which the subject, ore, is drained from the land to be used by mankind. By relating the ore's past history and current usage, Riddle 83 works to resist anthropocentric attitudes to the purpose of the non-human world, attitudes that were as central in early medieval thought as they are in modern times. The riddle also resists a strong tendency in the riddle collection to define a subject by how useful it is to humans and explores the consequences of the theological notion that everything on earth is made for humanity's use.

The first five chapters show how the natural world is subjugated under humans in the riddles, but the riddles discussed in Chapter 6 provide examples of the way in which nature can 'fight back' against humanity's dominion. This chapter is inspired by the principle of resistance in eco-theology which claims that 'the earth and its components actively resist those injustices imposed by humans'.[117] In order to show how relevant this modern theory is to certain Anglo-Saxon texts, I discuss the collection's two drinking riddles, Riddles 11 and 27, in which the drink has mastery over the human body and mind. Riddle 11 relates how wine can lead humans on unwise journeys, whilst Riddle 27 relates the way in which mead has physical mastery over a human's limbs. Though the two riddles are quite different in design, their depictions of the agency given to the two different intoxicating drinks may have been inspired by personifications of alcoholic drinks in the Proverbs, where it is said that 'wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise' (Proverbs, 20.1).[118] Significantly, whilst Riddle 11 focuses on Christian concerns about

[116] Buell, p. 7.
[117] Deane-Drummond, p. 90.
[118] I quote here from the *NKJB* for reasons which are explained in Chapter 6.

the effects of drinking, concentrating on the attractiveness of the drink, Riddle 27 depicts a natural resource being turned in a warrior-like force that can bring humans to the ground – a reversal of the degradation of the tree in Riddles 53 and 73.

My final chapter, Chapter 7, ventures into the Exeter Book riddles' realms of *degolfulne dom* 'mysterious power' and *dyran cræftes* 'precious knowledge' (R. 83, 13) to consider the notion that 'knowing is the quintessential anthropocentric act of appropriation'.[119] I explore the way in which certain riddles – namely, Riddles 1, 2 and 3 and 84 – challenge readers' beliefs in their own powers of 'knowing' and thus the 'anthropocentric act of appropriation'. I compare both the riddles' depiction of wisdom and, in the case of Riddle 1, the use of sardonic rhetoric to God's questioning of Job in the Old Testament wisdom poem The Book of Job (Job, 38-42). These passages from Job, often discussed by eco-theologians for their attack on anthropocentrism, show God enlightening Job on the non-human aspects of His creation and chastising Job for thinking he knows everything about the world. God's questions are largely rhetorical and expose the limits of wisdom as much as they ask for answers – God says such things as *asindica mihi, si habes intelligentiam* (Job, 38.4)[120] – and I suggest Riddle 1 performs a similar rhetorical game.

Through these seven chapters I hope to illustrate the diverse ways the Exeter Book riddles resist anthropocentrism, anthropocentrism that exists in the riddles in the form of human language, culture and perspective, and anthropocentrism in Anglo-Saxon and Biblical literature. I draw on both the fields of eco-criticism and eco-theology, as well as a variety of Biblical sources, in order explore the relationship between human and non-human in the collection and attitudes towards the created

[119] Harold Fromm, 'Aldo Leopold: Aesthetic "Anthropocentrist"', in *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003,* ed. by Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), pp. 3-9 (p. 4).
[120] 'Tell me if thou hast understanding.'

world. By combining the fields of eco-criticism and eco-theology I hope to demonstrate the ways in which theology plays a role in the depiction of nature; just as modern sympathies are largely a response to the way we have treated nature in the recent past, with the advent of industrialisation, medieval sympathies are largely a response to the exploitation of nature after the Fall. My aim is not to label these texts as 'green', though they contain strong, persuasive green elements, but, like Rudd, to 'bring to the fore [what] is usually either relegated to the background or simply overlooked altogether'.[121]

[121] Rudd, p. 4.

1.
‘be sonde, sæwealle neah’:
Locating Non-Human Subjects in an Anthropocentric World

‘Anyone looking for place-sense in literature had better start with modest expectations’.[1]

Place as it features in the Old English elegies has received much attention from scholars, with various studies dedicated to understanding its role and significance,[2] yet place in the Old English riddles has received little or no attention. Why scholars stop at the riddles is perplexing. It is certainly the case that ‘in some writing the physical context may be minimal or may not have a sufficiently important influence on the chief interest of the work to merit our attention’;[3] yet this is not the case for the Exeter Book riddles. A large number of the riddle-subjects define themselves by

[1] Buell, p. 254.

[2] See, for example, Patricia Dailey, ‘Questions of Dwelling in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Mysticism: Inhabiting Landscape, Body, and Mind’, *New Medieval Literatures*, 8 (2006), 175-214, and Megan Cassidy-Welch, ‘Space and Place in Medieval Contexts’, *Parergon*, 27, (2010), 1-12. See also the following collections of essays: Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, eds, *A Place to Believe In: Locating Medieval Landscapes* (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2006), and Laura L. Howes, ed., *Place, Space, and Landscape in Medieval Narrative* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007). The former considers pre- and post-conquest texts, whilst the latter is more interested in late medieval literature. For a historical-geographical study see John Howe and Michael Wolf, *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002). Other studies include: Fabienne Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), and Nicholas Howe*, Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

[3] Leonard Lutwack, *The Role of Place in Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1984), p. 38.

place, and place is often at the forefront of the subject's or narrator's consciousness. A riddle-subject's sense of place can be just as important to a riddle's narrative as the *beorges setl* 'hill habitation' is to Guthlac A (*GA*, 383b), the *eorðscræfe* 'earth-cave' to *The Wife's Lament* (*WL*, 28b) and the *ærsceaft* 'ancient building' to *The Ruin* (*Rn*, 16b). As in other Exeter Book texts, place in the riddles is often more than an incidental backdrop; it is fundamental to the fabric of their design. Certain riddles, including primarily, though not exclusively, Riddles 15 ('badger'), 53 (?), 60 ('reed-staff'), 71 ('sword'), 72 ('ox'), 73 ('spear'), 77 ('oyster'), 81 ('weathercock'), 83 ('ore'), 88 ('antler') and 93 ('antler'), emphasise a sense of place and make the environment a key part of their narratives.

A sense of place is one of the key components of an ecological text; place is often perceived as 'foundational for ecological consciousness'.[4] Place can be more than simply a backdrop or setting, grounding humans and non-humans alike in a physical world, an 'actual environment'.[5] However, as Lawrence Buell asserts, 'grounding in place patently does not necessarily guarantee eco-centrism, place being by definition perceived or felt space, space humanized, rather than the material world taken on its own terms'.[6] Place alone does not make a text ecological, and recognising this fact is important to the way we interpret place in the riddles. In this chapter, I argue that not only does place play an important part of the riddles, but that it forms part of the riddles' resistance to anthropocentrism. Human notions of place may seem to dominate the collection, with a large number of the riddle's non-human subjects orientating themselves by their proximity to human dwellings, but there are times when the riddles resist such anthropocentrism, offering an eco-centric sense of

[4] Philip Tolliday, 'Ecotheology as a Plea for Place', in *Earth Revealing, Earth Healing: Ecology and Christian Theology*, ed. by Denis Edwards (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), pp. 177-193 (p. 178).
[5] Lutwack, p. 37.
[6] Buell, p. 253.

place, including an appreciation of those environments on the borders of human civilisation.

To explore place in the riddles it is useful to begin by thinking about how place functions as a descriptor, the term 'descriptor' being used here to mean a specific way of describing the riddle subject, such as by the subject's form or function. There are a number of key ways in which the Exeter Book Riddle subjects define themselves, and the most common of these are a) the subject's usefulness (or, occasionally, threat) to humans; b) the subject's physical appearance; c) the subject's relationship to humans (i.e. its subservience to a master); d) the subject's skill or knowledge; and e) the subject's dwelling place (or displacement). To explore place, it is useful to consider how it functions alongside other descriptors and, perhaps more importantly, those instances when place has a function beyond being a mere descriptor. I would like to approach this topic by creating my own riddle that makes use of all the key descriptors, taking a wooden ruler as my subject.

A modern riddle-writer describes a ruler as 'I am a king but also a common device of measure' and asks 'what am I?'[7] The riddle-writer relies on the double meaning of 'ruler' to supply the enigma. If I were to write a riddle about a ruler using some of the descriptors common to the Exeter Book riddles it would be very different from this modern riddle. Instead of relying on the double meaning of 'ruler' I might begin with a simple description of the ruler's form:

I am flat and straight, marked at intervals down my side.

[7] Anonymous, 'A King and Device of Measure' <www.riddlesbrainteasers.com/king-device-measure> [Accessed 15/07/2014].

This description, however, does not particularly evoke the style of the Exeter Book riddles. An Exeter Book riddle subject is sometimes described by its colour or adornments, which give clues to its identity. For example, Riddle 11 opens with*: Hrægl is min haso-fag, hyrste beorhte, / reade ond scire on reafe minum* 'my clothing is grey, my trappings bright, [I am] red and shiny in my garment' (R. 11, 1a-2b). But the writer can also describe the subject in terms of its 'body parts'. That is, certain riddles describe their subject by imagining how its shape mirrors the human body. The object of Riddle 21, for example, has a *hrycg* 'back' or 'spine', as well as a *steorte* 'tail', a *heafde* 'head' and *toþum* 'teeth' (R. 21, 11a, 4b,12b & 14a), which reflects the shape of the plough. In my own riddle I might then adapt the language to describe something more corporeal:

> I have a spine, but no arms or legs; wounds scar me on my side,
> though I have not seen battle.

The use of 'spine' would reflect the shape of the ruler and the 'wounds' the markings on the ruler's side. In the Exeter Book riddles, markings can be depicted as wounds, like the markings on the chalice in Riddle 59, referred to as the *beages benne* 'ring's wounds' (R. 59, 11b-12a). In my riddle, I have played with the idea that though the ruler has 'wounds' it has not seen battle, offering the opposite of *oft ic wig seo* 'I see battle often' (R. 5, 3b) that is used to describe the wounded shield. Having described the ruler's form, I might then consider how the object is both useful to humans and what secret knowledge or skill it might have:

> I have a spine, but no arms or legs; wounds scar me on my side,
> though I have not seen battle. I know the measure of many things.
> I am useful to men.

Then, I might think about its relationship to humans and what task it performs for him:

> I have a spine, but no arms or legs. Wounds scar me on my side, though I have not seen battle. I am useful to men for I know the measure of many things. I am a servant, though people call me a king. I must obey my master, stay very still, whilst he drives sharp points along straight paths beside me.

I have used the master-servant relationship here to describe the subject, although I have brought in the double meaning of 'ruler' to add further ambiguity. Some riddle subjects must stay still, like the antler/inkwell of Riddle 88 which cannot *gewendan* 'move' and must *stondan fæste* 'stand firm' on the table (R. 88, 22b & 30b). I have also used the common theme of a master driving the servant on a path, used, for example, in Riddle 51, where a human *wegas tæcneþ ofer fæted gold* 'designates [the subject's] road over ornamented gold' (R. 51, 6a-7a) and in Riddle 21 where the subject's *hlaford* 'lord' *wrigaþ on wonge* 'presses [it] forwards upon the field' (R. 21, 3b-5a). Finally, I might think about the subject's origins, the environment in which it grew up, and how it came to be in the hands of humans:

> I grew up in a wood, where the sun and rain nourished me. I lived in joy. My feet stood in the warm earth, my arms reached up to Heaven. Then I was cut down by enemies, changed from the thing I was, filed and smoothed. I now have a spine, but no arms or legs. Wounds scar me on my side, though I have not seen battle. I am useful to men for I know the measure of many things. I am a servant, though people call me a king. I must obey my master, stay very still, whilst he drives my kinsmen along straight paths beside me.

Here, I have considered the subject's initial dwelling place, including its sources of nourishment and its contentment; it previously lived in joy, like the tree of Riddle 53 which *wæs on wynne* 'existed in joy' (R. 53, 2b) and is nourished like the tree of Riddle 73, which *on wonge aweox* 'grew up in a field' and was *feddon* 'fed' by *hruse*

ond heofonwolcn ‘earth and heaven-cloud’ (R. 73, 1a-2a). I then consider how men cut it down and shaped it, echoing the way the enemies changed Riddle 73’s tree from *þære gecynde* ‘the quality’ that it *ær cwic beheold* ‘previously held when living’ (R. 73, 4a-b). I also change ‘sharp points’ to ‘kinsman’ to describe the pencil, reflecting the fact that it is also made out of wood, perhaps the same wood.

What is also present in my riddle now is a narrative,[8] and this narrative is generated by the mention of the subject’s origins.[9] A basic riddle that plays on the double meaning of ‘ruler’ – ‘I am a king but also a common device of measure. What am I?’ – has been transformed into an elaborate description of an embodied entity, limbless and scarred, a displaced protagonist in a narrative that relates its transformation from a tree that grew up in a pleasant environment to a useful object that serves humans.

It should be noted that most riddles do not contain all of these different descriptors together; an origin narrative that evokes a sense of place may not refer to the object’s usefulness, whilst a riddle that refers to a subject’s knowledge and skill might not describe its form. But place has an interesting and important relationship with the other descriptors employed alongside it, whatever it is combined with. Riddle 81, for example, depicts an object that can be understood in part by its form, but also by contextualising it through place and the subject’s experience of that place:

> Ic eom bylgedbreost, belcedsweora;
> heafod hæbbe ond heane steort,

[8] Following the basic meaning of narrative as ‘an account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them’ ("narrative, *n*." OED 3rd ed. 2003. OED Online. Oxford University Press. April 2015 <http://dictionary.oed.com/>). The frequent use of narration in the Exeter Book riddles is noted by Tupper (*Riddles*, p. xciv). For a brief discussion of narrative as a distinctive feature of literary riddles see Živilė Gimbutas, *The Riddle in the Poem* (New York: University Press of America, 2004), p. 3.

[9] That certain riddles offer a parallel between a subject’s past and present is noted by Murphy (p. 140). Bitterli offers a discussion of the narrative of R. 88, calling it ‘an almost cinematic narrative, in which the scenes and places of now and then fade in and out’ (p. 154-5).

eagan ond earan ond ænne foot,
hrycg ond heard nebb, hneccan steapne
ond sidan twa, stagol on middum,
eard ofer ældum. Aglac dreoge,
þær mec wegeð se þe wudu hrereð,
ond mec stondende streamas beatað,
hægl se hearda, ond hrim þeceð,
[.]orst […..]eoseð, ond fealleð snaw
on þyrelwombne; ond ic þæt [.]ol[……..
…….] mæ[.] wonsceaft mine.
(R. 81, 1-12)[10]

After considering the object's basic shape and form the writer goes on to locate the subject in an *eard ofer ældum* 'home over humans' (R. 81, 11b-12a) and then relates the hardships the weathercock suffers in this dwelling-place. The elegiac second half of the riddle, beginning at line 6b, stands in contrast to the enigmatic opening that describes the object's basic appearance. The riddle would be solvable were it to conclude at line 12a, where it says its home is *ofer ældum* 'over humans', yet the writer still goes on to imagine the object as an experiencing being, relating the weathercock's suffering and locating it in a hostile world. Here, then, place is more than mere descriptor; it is somewhat superfluous as a clue, but serves to give a context and a sense of the object's experience of the physical world.

Place Ecology: Resisting Anthropocentrism

As I said in the introduction to this chapter, certain riddle subjects orientate themselves by their proximity to human dwellings, suggesting an anthropocentric view of place: a swan describes how its *hyrste* 'garments' and the *hea lyft* 'high air'

[10] I am puff-breasted, swollen-necked, I have a head, a high tail, eyes and ears and one foot, a back, a hard beak, and long neck and two sides, a staff in my middle, a home over humans. I suffer torment where the one who stirs the woods moves me; and waters and hard hail beat me standing [there], and rime covers me, and frost freezes and snow falls against my pierced stomach and I must endure that, though I cannot weep.' I have constructed the latter part of the translation using a convincing reconstruction offered by Krapp and Dobbie: *ond ic þæt [þ]ol[ian sceal, | ne ic wepan] mæ[g] | wonsceaft mine* (ASPR, vol. III, p. 373).

ahebbað ofer hæleþa byht 'lift [it] over heroes' homes' (R. 7, 3a-4b); the aforementioned weathercock is in an *eard ofer ældum* 'home over humans' (R. 81, 6a); and the storm resounds loudly *ofer burgum* 'over towns' (R. 3, 39b). The rune-staff describes its solitary dwelling place in the natural world in terms of its lack of familiarity to humans:

> Fea ænig wæs
> monna cynnes þæt minne þær
> on anæde eard beheolde,
> (R. 60, 3b-5b)[11]

What is more, the hall is often depicted as the centre of the imagined world in the riddle collection, adhering to an anthropocentric view of place. On the map of the Anglo-Saxon imagination the hall is 'a circle of light and peace enclosed by darkness, discomfort and danger',[12] and what is outside of it, the peripheral woods, fens and seas, are the realms of 'otherness' inhabited by exiles, or social outcasts like *Beowulf*'s Grendel.[13] The Anglo-Saxon hall comfortably fits the following definition of a text's central place:

> To orient himself in the world man seems to require a sense of the deployment of persons, things, and places around a center, and this center thus acquires paramount importance over all around it. […] the centrality of a place in a literary work is established by the frequency and importance of the transactions that occur in it, by its

[11] 'there were hardly any humans who beheld there my solitary native home'.
[12] Kathryn Hume, 'The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry', *ASE*, 3 (1974), 63-74 (p. 64).
[13] For discussions of the hall and other symbols of human community see Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry*, CSASE, 18 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially Chapter 3 and pp. 128-29. Magennis also discusses the depictions of monstrous dwellings as inversions of the Classical *locus amoenus* (pp. 138-40). See also Neville, *Representations*, pp. 71-72, for a discussion of the dwelling places of monsters and social outcasts.

> weight in the behaviour of the characters, and by the force of the imagery and style describing it.[14]

In the riddles – if we consider the texts collectively – we get the impression that the hall is the central place, primarily because of the 'frequency and importance of the transactions that occur in it'.[15] Subjects 'sing' in it, 'speak' in it and are brought into it;[16] they are also part of important ceremonies in it. An example of a subject being involved in a ceremony in the hall is found in Riddle 20:

> Cyning mec gyrweð
> since ond seolfre ond mec on sele weorþað,
> ne wyrneð wordlofes, wisan mæneð
> mine for mengo þær hy meodu drincað,
> (R. 20, 9b-12b)[17]

Another example occurs in Riddle 59, where the subject (a chalice) plays a role in a religious ceremony.[18] The poet challenges the reader to

> Ræde, se þe wille
> hu ðæs wrætlican wunda cwæden
> hringes to hæleþum þa he in healle wæs
> wylted ond wended wloncra folmum.
> (R. 59, 15b-18b)[19]

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[14] Lutwack, pp. 42-3.

[15] *Ibid.* It has been asserted that the definition of *sele* is not limited to just 'hall' but can also mean simply 'dwelling'. See C. H. De Roo, 'The Old English *Sele', Neophilologus*, 64 (1980), 113-20. This possibility should not concern us much here, however, since it is clear the narrators speak of human dwellings.

[16] See Riddles 31, 60, 52 and 59 respectively.

[17] 'The King adorns me with treasure and silver and honours me in the hall, does not refuse [me] praise, speaks of my nature in front of the crowd, where they drink mead.'

[18] The identity of this subject is a matter of debate, but I agree with those critics who see it as an engraved chalice used in religious ceremonies (see Williamson, *Riddles*, p. 313). For a discussion of Riddle 59 as chalice and an alternative reading see Elisabeth Osaka, 'Old English "hring" in Riddles 48 and 59', *Medium Aevum*, 62 (1993), 61-69.

[19] 'Explain, if you will, how the wounds of this wondrous ring spoke to heroes, when in the hall it was turned and moved in proud hands.'

Sometimes the hall is referred to indirectly as the place where men drink, as in Riddles 55, 56, 63 and 67.[20] Similarly, the rune-staff of Riddle 60 relates how it will *ofer meodubence muðleas sprecan / wordum wrixlan* 'speak mouthless over the mead-bench' (R. 60, 9a-10a). Though place is important to the descriptions of these riddle-subjects, it is not an eco-centric depiction of place.

A final example of an anthropocentric view of place appears in Riddle 15. This riddle, which describes an animal protecting its young from an adversary, seems very much interested in place, in the *geruman* 'space' the subject occupies and defends (R. 15, 16a). The animal speaks of its *eðle* 'home' or 'native land' (R. 15, 12a) in some detail, describing how it travels through a *steapne beorg* 'steep hill' (R. 15, 18a) and leads its family *on degolne weg þurh dune þyrel* 'on a secret way through hill's hole' (R. 15, 20-21). The riddle's physical context is vivid, with the animal orientating itself in its environment as it fights off an invading adversary. Yet the place is very much 'place humanized'; the writer gives us an image of a warrior protecting its hall in the narrative of a badger protecting its offspring. The narrator speaks of its home in architectural terms, calling its home a *wic* 'house' (R. 15, 8b) and alluding to doors and a roof; the subject warns, *hwonne gæst cume / to durum minum, him biþ deað witod* 'when the guest should come to my doors, death is its lot' (R. 15, 10b-11b), and describes how it will *þurh hylles hrof geræce* 'reach through the hill's roof' to strike the *laðgewinnum* 'hated enemy' it *longe fleah* 'long fled' (R. 15, 27-29). Riddle 15's depiction of an animal dwelling is an example of when place 'does not guarantee eco-centrism', for, though we can discern a strong interest in place, this place is highly

[20] Examples include *þær hæleð druncon* 'where heroes drank' (R. 55, 1b and R. 56, 11b), *þær guman druncon* 'where men drank' (R. 67, 15a), and *þær guman drincað* 'where men drink' (R. 63, 3b).

anthropocentric; in this riddle, a natural dwelling is transfigured into a human dwelling.[21]

The apparent humanisation of place in the riddle collection would seem to frustrate notions that a sense of place contributes to the collection's ecological consciousness. This is not the case. In fact, the Old English riddle collection creates a sense of place that resists as much as it encompasses an anthropocentric worldview. Despite the centrality of the hall across the texts, there are certain riddles, including Riddles 60, 88 and 93, that are interested in peripheral places, in non-human dwellings that are on the boundaries of the human world. These places are far from the hall, usually either in a forest or sea, and the writers dedicate several lines to the evocation of these environments. Unlike Riddle 15, these natural dwelling-places are rarely humanised and the poets imagine the way in which a riddle-subject is taken from this idyllic environment and integrated into the human world.

Using some of the themes employed in Old English elegies for exploring a person's sense of place, including stasis and movement, past and present, the riddle-poets depict a subject's nostalgia for a past habitation, an idyllic environment.[22] Where human subjects express a nostalgia for a built place, the world of the hall that offered them security and society, the non-human subjects in the riddles express a nostalgia for a natural place, a world that once offered them nourishment and safety. It is this attention to the natural environment and the non-human experience of the physical

[21] This transfiguration is not dissimilar to the transfiguration of the monsters' dwellings in *Beowulf* into human-like dwellings. See Hume, pp. 70-3, Neville, *Representations*, pp. 75-6, and Magennis, *Images of Community*, p. 62. See also Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 30. The dwelling of Grendel's mother, says Orchard, 'is described in human, almost homely terms'.

[22] For stasis and movement see Stacy S. Klein, 'Gender and the Nature of Exile in the Old English Elegies', in *A Place to Believe in: Locating Medieval Landscapes*, ed. by Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2006), pp. 113-31. Two key studies on past and present and nostalgia include Low's 'Eco-poetry and the Anglo-Saxon Elegy' and Heyworth's 'Nostalgic Evocation'. See also Renée Rebecca Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009) for a discussion of nostalgia in other types of Old English poetry.

world that works to resist anthropocentric representations of place in the riddle collection.

'Ic on wonge aweox': Evoking a Sense of Place

As alluded to previously, the Exeter Book riddles' subjects live in various places, from human dwellings to natural environments. One *biden in burgum* 'lived in towns' (R. 83, 2a), another in an *inne* 'house' (R. 56, 1a), whilst others are said to live in a *healle* 'hall' (R. 55, 1a) or *on ceole* 'in a ship' (R. 18, 4a). Riddle 63 describes the object as being *on cofan* 'in a room' (R. 63, 4a), providing an enclosed space for what is an intimate moment when a *tillic esne* 'good servant' *cysseð muþe* 'kisses [its] mouth' and *wyrceð his willa* 'works his will' (R. 63, 4-7). Some subjects seem fixed in their places, like the inkwell that *gewendan ne mæg* 'cannot move' (R. 88, 30b), whilst others move about the land; one *fere wide* 'travel[s] widely' (R. 95, 3b), whilst another travels the *sið wræcce* 'path of exile' (R. 1, 4b). Some are described in terms of displacement; the sea creature of Riddle 78 is *ne æt ham gesæt* 'did not sit at home' (R. 78, 6), whilst *se eþel fremde* 'the native land [is] foreign' to the anchor (R. 16, 3b).

The places the riddle subjects inhabit are depicted with varying degrees of description, from the use of one word to the use of several lines. We might call some of these places 'settings'. These settings are to be distinguished from 'place imagery' and 'place allusions', as Lutwack explains:

> Setting denotes a place of action in both narrative as well as drama and to that extent it is an important category of place in literature, but setting is not adequate to describe the use of places unrelated to action, such as metaphors or evocations of places in the speeches of or consciousness of characters.[23]

[23] Lutwack, p. 28.

In the riddles, a setting may be a home or a field or a room, such as the *inne* 'house' in Riddle 56, the *cofan* 'room' of Riddle 63, or the *ceole* 'ship' of Riddle 18. Evocations of place, however, are very different. Evocations of place, Lutwack says, can be found in 'the speeches of or consciousness of characters'; they are formed in a subject's or narrator's imagination or related through their narratives, as opposed to being incidental backdrops. Place allusions and evocations in the riddles, then, include those riddles in which the subjects relate the places of their youth, such as the tree's description of its blissful homeland in Riddle 73, and contrast them with their current situation. These evocations of place typically occur in longer descriptions in the riddles. In such descriptions, the riddle-writers typically describe the location in which the subjects have grown up and the way in which nature once nourished them. See Riddle 77, for example, where the sea provides food and protection:

> Sæ mec fedde, sundhelm þeahte,
> ond mec yþa wrugon eorþan getenge,
> (R. 77, 1a-2b)[24]

And Riddle 73, which describes the initial home of the tree and its nourishment by earth and water:

> Ic on wonge aweox, wunode þær mec feddon
> hruse ond heofonwolcn,
> (R. 73, 1a-2a)[25]

See also Riddle 92, in which the tree also plays the nourisher:

[24] 'The sea fed me, the ocean's top roofed me, and waves covered me, lying on the earth'.
[25] 'I grew in a field, dwelt where earth and heaven-cloud fed me'.

Ic wæs brunra beot, beam on holte,
freolic feorhbora ond foldan wæstm,
(R. 92, 1a-2b)[26]

These types of riddles are some of the most useful to us in terms of understanding the significance of place in the collection, giving us access to how the natural world was perceived as a habitat for non-human beings.

Another riddle that evokes a sense of place is Riddle 93. Place plays a fundamental role in this riddle and is highly eco-centric. The first half of the riddle describes his master's (the stag's) navigation of the natural world:

Frea min […….
…….]de willum sinum
[…….]
heah ond hyht [……...
…….] earpne, hwilum […….
……..]wilum sohte
frea [……]s wod
dægrime frod deo[……]s;
hwilum stealc hliþo stigan sceolde
up in eþel; hwilum eft gewat
in deop dalu duguþe secan
strong on stæpe, stanwongas grof
hrimighearde; hwilum hara scoc
forst of feaxe.
(R. 93, 1-14a)[27]

[26] 'I was the boast of brown ones, a tree in the wood, a glorious life-giver and earth's produce'.

[27] 'My lord …. his pleasure … high and hope … dusky, sometimes … [my] lord sometimes sought … old in days went … sometimes had to climb steep slopes above [his] native land; afterwards sometimes he went in deep dells, sought out [his] company, strong in his step, dug stony fields frozen hard; sometimes he shook hoary frost from [his] hair.' The manuscript is too badly damaged to offer a fully reconstructed text. I have reconstructed *wilum* as *[h]wilum* in line 6, since, as Krapp and Dobbie say, 'this is obviously to be restored' (ASPR, III, p. 380). I have also reconstructed *deo[.....]s* as *deo[pe streama]s*, using J. Schipper's suggestion in 'Zum Codex Exoniensis', *Gemania*, 19 (1874), 327-38 (p. 338). This reconstruction is also accepted by Krapp and Dobbie (ASPR, III, p. 380).

The subject, an antler, describes how it travelled over various places with its master, traversing *deope streamas* ‘deep streams’, *stealc hliþo* 'steep slopes', *deop dalu* 'deep valleys', and *stanwongas* ‘stony fields’ before it became an inkwell (R. 93, 7b-11b). More lines are dedicated to describing the natural environment where the subject grew up than the place where it lives now, which is rather more obscure; in comparison to thirteen lines describing where the subject grew up, we get the rather vague *þær ic stonde* ‘where I stand’ to describe its current location (R. 93, 25b).[28] This is also the case for the collection’s other antler riddle, Riddle 88, where more lines are dedicated to describing the subject’s initial dwelling place in the forest (R. 88, 1a-14b) than its new home on the *bordes on ende* ‘table's end’ (R. 88, 19b-22a). Another, and perhaps the best, example of a longer, more detailed description of a subject’s environment appears in the first seven lines of Riddle 60:

> Ic wæs be sonde sæwealle neah
> æt merefaroþe; minum gewunade
> frumstaþole fæst. Fea ænig wæs
> monna cynnes, þæt minne þær
> on anæde eard beheolde,
> ac mec uhtna gehwam yð sio brune
> lagufæðme beleolc.
>
> (R. 60, 1a-7a)[29]

The focus is clearly on place in these opening lines, with references made to a *frumstaþole* ‘original place’ and an *anæde eard* ‘solitary native home’. The words *be* ‘by’, *neah* ‘near’ and *æt* ‘at’ all work to locate the subject in its early environment. What is more, the dwelling place of the rune-staff is described in some detail; within just a few lines the riddle writer has alluded to *sonde* ‘sand’, *sæwealle* ‘sea-wall’, *merefaroþe*

[28] This is clear despite the damage to the manuscript.
[29] ‘I was by sand, near a sea wall, at the pool-surge, remained firmly in my original place; there were hardly any humans who beheld there my solitary native home, but every dawn the gleaming wave played about me with its watery embrace.’

'pool-surge' and *yð* 'wave'. There is also no anthropocentric reference to human locations; halls or towns are not referenced to orientate human readers or used as metaphors for describing this alien environment.

All these riddles begin by situating their subjects in 'peripheral' places, the opposite of the central place.[30] The early dwelling of the antler in Riddle 93 may be described anthropocentrically as the *eþel* 'native home' of the narrator's *frea* 'lord' (R. 93, 1a & 9a), just as the badger is depicted as the protector of its hall-like hill in Riddle 15, but it is nevertheless a peripheral place with distinctly natural features, including streams, slopes, fields and valleys. Likewise, the antler of Riddle 88 is said to have grown up in a forest before it ended up on a table, inferring that it is, like its brother, *on wera æhtum* 'among men's possessions' (R. 88, 23b). The rune-staff lived in a place that humans have seldom seen, in a watery, *anæde* 'solitary' home (R. 60, 5a). By depicting peripheral places, the riddle-writers invite us to imagine environments beyond the human-centred worldview. Their evocations of place offer us the opposite of those we find in the more human-centric elegies; rather than show a man or woman leaving the comfort of the human world to enter the natural world, they show a non-human subject leaving the natural world to enter the human world.

Usually, and perhaps unsurprisingly, a riddle subject's movements are dictated by the subject's function. Because of the nature of their uses, certain subjects are fixed to the spot, like the bookcase, for example, which is *eardfæstne* 'standing fixed to the ground', or, literally, 'earth-fast' (R. 49, 1a). Likewise, the weathercock's existence in his *eard ofer ældum* 'home over humans' (R. 81, 6a) is necessarily one of stasis as opposed to journeying and any movement is dictated by the one who *þe wudu hrereð*

[30] Lutwack, p. 44.

'stirs the wood' (R. 81, 7b). Another example is the book of Riddle 95 which, like the Wanderer and Seafarer, is 'consign[ed] to perpetual movement';[31] yet, unlike the human travellers, goes on a journey that is not spiritual or lonely, but that is brought about by its function as a book. There are riddles, however, where movement is not dictated by the subject's function. These riddles are those which depict a subject as a natural resource before it was made into an object. Such riddles contrast the subject's experience of being in its natural surroundings to its displacement and current stasis or movement in the hands of humans. The 'horror of displacement',[32] typically associated with human beings and dramatized in the Old English elegies, is just as real for non-human entities.

The difference between non-human and human experiences of place and displacement is considered by Tolliday in his article about the importance of place to ecotheology. Regarding the natural stasis of trees, he says:

> It is a truism too obvious to be stated that a human being differs from a tree. These differences are manifest and many, but a primary difference of place often goes without comment. A tree simply stands in its own place. […] As Hans Jonas remarks, 'with its adjacent surroundings, the plant forms one permanent context into which it is fully integrated, as the animal never can be in an environment.' The tree may well be displaced by external circumstance, but it will not displace itself, for it cannot move. The tree is in-place, and if it is to live, it cannot be other than in-place. To be out-of-place is death.[33]

It is interesting to interpret place in the riddles in terms of 'permanent contexts' and displacement by 'external circumstance'. A number of riddle subjects describe themselves by their experience of a permanent context, like the weathercock, as well

[31] Klein, p. 115.
[32] Tolliday, p. 178.
[33] *Ibid*., p. 180. Tolliday cites Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Towards a Philosophical Biology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 104.

as by their displacement from that context by 'external circumstance'. The riddle writers, for example, consider the displacement of trees (in Riddles 53 and 73) and how they become 'out-of-place' through their removal from their homes at the hands of humans. We find in the riddles a contrast between being 'in-place' in the natural world and being in a state of stasis or activity in the human world as an object, as in Riddle 93, for example. As previously noted, the antler of this riddle describes how its *frea* 'lord', *dægrime frod* 'old in days',

> hwlium stealc hliþo stigan sceolde
> up in eþel; hwilum eft gewat
> in deop dalu duguþe secan
> strong on stæpe, stanwongas grof
> hrimighearde;
> (R. 93, 8a-12a)[34]

It then describes how it *fusum rad* 'rode the striving one' (R. 93, 13b), until (in a scenario reminiscent of *The Wife's Lament*)[35] its *gingra broþor* 'younger brother' *of earde adraf* 'drove [it] out of [its] native land' (R. 93, 14b-15b). Now it has a sedentary life:

> Nu ic blace swelge
> wuda ond wætre, w[..]b[.] befæðme
> þæt mec on fealleð ufan þær ic stonde,
> eorpes nathwæt;
> (R. 93, 23b-26a)[36]

[34] 'sometimes had to climb steep hills up in [his] native land, afterwards sometimes went in deep dells, sought out [his] company, strong in his step, dug stony fields frozen hard'.

[35] Like the Wife, the antler has been deprived of its home and forced to endure suffering. They both also depict a family feud; the antler refers to the growth of new antlers pushing them out – *eard oðþringan / gingran broþor* 'younger brothers force [us] away from our native land' (R. 88, 16b-17a), whilst the Wife relates how the *monnes magaa* 'man's [i.e. her lord's] kinsmen' began to *hycgan* 'plot' *þurh dyrne geþoht þæt hy todælden unc* 'through a secret design that they might separate us' (*WL*, 11a-12b).

[36] 'Now I swallow black wood and water, my womb encloses something dark which falls on me from above where I stand.'

As an inkwell, it stands in the same place, unable to move. Similarly, in Riddle 88, a possible 'companion piece' to Riddle 93,[37] the narrator expresses anxiety about his and his brother's removal from his original dwelling place in the forest, lamenting the fact that he no longer knows where his brother is:

> ne wat hwær min broþor on wera æhtum
> eorþan sceata eardian sceal,
> se me ær be healfe heah eardade.
> (R. 88, 23a-25b)[38]

The forest was its natural environment before its displacement; *bordes on ende* 'the table's end' (R. 88, 20a & 21b) is its current place of residence among human possessions. Ecologically speaking, the riddle draws a distinction between natural and unnatural dwelling places, the unnatural being expressed through the subject's anxiety about its dislocation. An anthropocentric reading of these riddles would argue that the texts' authors depict the transference of human anxieties onto non-human entities; an ecological reading, however, argues that the writers are attempting to imagine the world from a non-human perspective and the impact of postlapsarian human beings on the natural order of the created world.

What I would also like to draw attention to is the interest these riddles show in the natural world itself, in the physical environment and the forests, valleys and rivers that make up this environment. It is a natural world, not a human world, and its very nature is brought into contrast with life in a human world, among human possessions, through the narratives. These riddles show an interest in nature itself; nature is literal

[37] Williamson, p. 381.

[38] 'I don't know where [in] the earth's regions, among men's possessions, my brother must abide, he who previously dwelt high by my side.'

and is central to the narratives, rather than metaphorical. Reading these riddles in this way, I take issue with R. E. Kaske's treatment of place in his 1967 article on Riddle 60, which interprets the riddle as part of a longer allegorical poem about the Cross.[39] Within his argument, Kaske attempts to interpret literal, physical places as allegorical places but is thwarted by the nature of the places themselves. In the first instance, Kaske tries to explain the riddle as an allegory of the Tree of Life that grows in Paradise, but he encounters a problem: 'An apparent objection arises from the fact that in "Riddle 60" the water adjoining the tree is clearly conceived of as a sea or lake (*sæ wealle*, 1b; *merefaroþe*, 2a; *lagufæðme*, 7a), whereas in the Biblical description of Paradise it is just as clearly a river or stream flowing out of the earth'.[40] Kaske tries to confront this problem by saying that 'in certain early accounts of the Creation…the *fluvius* of Genesis is in fact understood as a reference to the sea or ocean'.[41] In the second instance, Kaske encounters a problem with the riddle-writer's indirect reference to the hall – that is, the moment the narrator considers with wonder how it is able to *ofer meodubence muðleas sprecan, / wordum wrixlan* 'speak mouthless across the mead-bench, exchange words' (R. 60, 9a-10a). In order to make this reference fit the proposed allegory, Kaske makes certain amendments to the original text and reverts to paraphrasing in his translations. 'If we emend [*ofer meodubence*] to *ofer meoduwongas* or *ofer meodubyrig*,' says Kaske, 'and paraphrase these lines, "…that I, once mouthless, should ever speak throughout the lands or dwellings of men," the reference might be to this same "speaking" of the Cross in Christendom at

[39] R. E. Kaske, 'A Poem of the Cross in the Exeter Book: "Riddle 60" and "The Husband's Message"', *Traditio,* 23 (1967), 41-71.
[40] *Ibid*., p. 67.
[41] *Ibid*., p. 67.

large, or to repeated missions of the kind exemplified by its present speech'.[42] Alternatively, Kaske says,

> if we accept the metrically faulty *ofer meodu*, and paraphrase the lines, "…that I who am mouthless should ever bring forth utterance surpassing mead," the meaning might be simply that the words of spiritual assurance spoken by the Cross are more sweet and intoxicating than mead itself'.[43]

I find these arguments unconvincing, not least because they require making substantial changes to the original text. Even Kaske acknowledges that 'none of these suggestions can be described as overwhelmingly convincing'; they are, he admits, 'desperate attempts' to 'mitigate the difficulty of what remains a formidable crux'.[44]

The crux for Kaske is the incapacity of the text's natural and human places to fit neatly into an allegorical reading. The allusions to place in Riddle 60 resist allegorical interpretation because of their specificity, their lack of ambiguity; together, *be sonde*, *sæwealle neah* and *æt merefaroþe* as descriptions give the place verisimilitude. Kaske's argument is an unpersuasive, anthropocentric, attempt to assimilate literal, physical places into an allegory; as such, it overlooks the importance of the physical environment to the text and the riddle's interest in humanity's relationship with the natural world.

Nostalgia for the Natural World

In their depictions of displacement, riddle subjects reflect on the environment of their youth as a type of Eden, where they fed and grew without suffering, and look back on

[42] *Ibid.,* p. 68.
[43] *Ibid*., p. 68.
[44] *Ibid*., p. 68.

this place from the perspective of their new life of suffering and servitude. The riddle-writers occasionally use utopias to bring about a feeling of nostalgia for a lost ideal, a place and time that the subjects can no longer experience. Nostalgia, says Melanie Heyworth, 'requires that the present be viewed negatively when compared with an asserted image of a remembered and, more importantly, *better* past'.[45] This nostalgia, says Heyworth, is a feature of the Old English elegies, which are fundamentally 'backward looking'.[46] They are, she says, 'a contemplation of a satisfying and favourable past now lost to a speaker who is exiled or dislocated within an unhappy present'.[47] This contrast of past and present is what we find in a number of the riddles, where the subject reflects on a happy existence before it was employed by humans in an 'unhappy present'. The is existence, presented as an Edenic utopia, acts as the '*better* past' and the post-lapsarian dystopia as the negative present. For a number of the riddles, such as the tree, ox and antler riddles, nostalgia plays as large a role as it does in the Old English elegies.

Place has a fundamental role in the evocation of nostalgia. The role of place, however, is an aspect that Heyworth neglects in her study of the Old English elegies in favour of sociological readings. In his study of eco-poetry and the elegies, however, Low sees place as central to the rendering of nostalgia and the suggestion of loss. In the elegies, Low says, humans experience nostalgia for the town, the built world, and it is the hostile natural world that makes them yearn for the comfort of the place to which they once belonged. Low observes how this is different from the Romantics' idea of nature and nostalgia with which we are more familiar:

[45] Heyworth, 'Nostalgic Evocation', p. 4.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 3.
[47] *Ibid*., p. 3.

> ...when the idea of nostalgia is discussed in relation to these earliest of poems in English literature, it is a very different sort of nostalgia than what is familiar to readers today. It is the urban centre, with its attendant political leadership, military might, and conveniences of human innovation, that the speakers of Anglo-Saxon elegies long for most – not the tree, the river, the field, or the wild animal that are made the objects of nostalgia today.[48]

Unlike in Romantic poetry, in most Old English poetry the built world is the place of comfort; in the Exeter Book riddles, however, the place of comfort is the natural world. The natural world is the place certain subjects look back to, as, for example, in Riddle 88. The opening eight lines are defective, but words like *weox* 'grew' and *geong* 'young' (R. 88, 1a & 8a) tell us that this would have been a description of the subject's growing up. Both the subject and its brother lived in a sheltering forest and it is said that *gescop meotud* 'the Creator shaped [them]' (R. 88, 14b). In that place of shelter, the narrator says,

> Ful oft unc holt wrugon,
> wudubeama helm wonnum nihtum,
> scildon wið scurum.
> (R. 88, 12b-14a)[49]

The dark wood offers protection for the subject and he remembers it fondly. A human has a yearning for a man-made habitation, whilst the subject of the riddle (a creature *gescop* 'shaped' by God) recollects its happy existence in nature's protection. In *The Wife's Lament*, the woman lives in a similar environment, in a grove *on wuda bearwe* 'in a wooded grove' (*WL*, 27a), yet the woman gets no comfort from her environment, which is *breum beweaxne* 'overgrown with briars' (*WL*, 31b).

[48] Low, p. 16.
[49] 'very often during dark nights the forest, the trees' foliage, covered us, shielded us from showers'.

I would like to argue here that the riddles convey a nostalgia not just for a subject's happier past before it was employed by humans, but for Eden itself, a world without suffering and servitude, and the setting is a key component in purveying a sense of loss and lamentation for a lost utopia. The riddles memorialise, that is, they commemorate the past by reminding humans of a deeper history, one that goes back to the beginning of creation. To evoke this lamentation for a lost utopia, they offer us glimpses of an environment that has its own history outside of human history and in which subjects experience happier times outside of the human world.

An example of a reference to a deep history comes in Riddle 84. In its depiction of the history of water,[50] the riddle appears to hark back to an earlier, idyllic time – to Eden. The lacuna makes it impossible to fully understand the meaning of lines 11a-20b, however, there are some key words that hint at former, happier times. The narrator speaks of *oþer cynn* 'other kin' and of an earth that *ær wæs / wlitig ond wynsum* 'was formerly beautiful and pleasant' (R. 84, 18a-20a), and it seems likely that line 20a is describing Eden. The narrator speaks of the water's creation, saying how the *fæder* 'father' (i.e. God) *ealle bewat, / or ond ende* 'saw it all, [her] origin and end' (R. 84, 9b-10a); she is *hæleþum frodra* 'older than heroes' (R. 84, 36b). The riddle can thus be said to be referring to a utopia that existed before the Fall of humankind when the land was fair and pleasant. In his discussion of central and peripheral places in literature, Lutwack describes the 'unfamiliar place', the place separate from the everyday world. This 'complete separation from the familiar world', he says,

> allows the suspension of the usual environmental conditions in these places and makes possible the purity of their essential nature:

[50] The solution 'water' is provided by all critics.

> absolute good in paradise without even a variation in time or season, absolute evil in inferno, absolute perfection in utopia.[51]

This type of place is very important to this study; as we shall see in Chapter 4, such an idyllic, unfamiliar place is described the Old English poem *The Phoenix*. In this poem, the utopia depicted by the author, in which plants flourish and cannot be harmed by harsh weather or sinful humans, is 'both a memory and a hope', a place of 'lasting and exquisite beauty'.[52] Here, in a place inaccessible to humans, the 'usual environmental conditions' are suspended, and the 'absolute good' of the realm is described in great detail.

Paradise is 'the archetype of the good landscape'; it is a place 'without extremes' in which there is not 'anxiety or want' and 'no dark storms of rain to disturb the pleasant scene'.[53] In the Anglo-Saxon imagination, utopia was both a happy past and closed-off present, a place without humans and a setting against which the postlapsarian dystopia of the riddles, the world 'belong[ing] to fallen nature',[54] could be compared. As we move into the next chapter, we will see that the utopian ideal is not just a green and pleasant setting, but a place without suffering or servitude in which humans and non-humans live in harmony with, not in opposition to, each other.

Conclusions

When approaching the issue of place-sense in the riddles, it was clear to me that place was often at the forefront of the writers' imaginations, despite the lack of scholarship on the subject suggesting otherwise. Working with Buell's premise that 'grounding in

[51] Lutwack, pp. 44-45.
[52] D. G. Calder, 'The Vision of Paradise: A Symbolic Reading of the Old English Phoenix', *ASE*, 1 (1972), 167-81 (pp. 175 and 168).
[53] Magennis, *Images of community*, p. 145.
[54] Calder, p. 171.

place does not necessarily guarantee eco-centrism', I have shown in this chapter how the riddles can both employ and resist human-centred notions of place. The riddles tend towards anthropocentric depictions of place in the way their subjects often orientate themselves in relation to humanity and in the way they, as a collection, validate the centrality of the Anglo-Saxon hall. Yet the riddles can offer an eco-centric depiction of place through their allusions to places beyond the human worldview and through the vividness and literalness of their descriptions. Some riddles depict their subjects as living and operating in a human dwelling, while others depict places that are distant from the human world; the most vivid evocations of place in the riddles are of the natural world that harbours natural materials or animals. What is more, in their evocations of place, certain riddles draw our attention to an environment that is older than the human world and to an Edenic place outside the suffering of the everyday world.

2.
‘earfoða dæl’:
The Groan of Travail in the Exeter Book Ox Riddles

Hiȝ! Hiȝ! micel gedeorf ys hit.[1]

In her book *The Riddle of Creation*, Ruth Wehlau asserts that ‘the [Exeter Book] riddles play with torment, turning it into an entertainment.’[2] For Wehlau, the violence in the riddles is a ‘play violence’, whereby ‘creatures are beaten, eaten, tortured, and torn apart in a make-believe version of war and torment’.[3] Read in this way, the depiction of non-human suffering is not to be regarded as sympathetic:

> The riddles are not especially sympathetic towards the creatures they depict, such as the ox or the cock and hen, nor is there any attempt to imagine the world from their point of view. The playful exaggerated violence that riddle creatures endure is more like cartoon violence than anything else, while the inanimate objects are, after all, not living and the sympathy that they inspire is as unreal as their suffering.[4]

[1] ‘Oh! Oh! It is much work.’ Old English taken from *Ælfric’s Colloquy*, ed. by G. N. Garmonsway (London: Methuen & Co., 1939). p. 21.
[2] Wehlau, p. 104.
[3] *Ibid*., p. 102.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 102.

Wehlau's assertions are as startling as they are anthropocentric. It is true that in the majority of Old English poetry there is no sympathy for the non-human world – as Neville muses, 'the Seafarer who laments his cold feet does not pity the sea birds with their icy feathers'[5] – but in the Old English riddles, where animals and human resources are described and ruminated on, special consideration is given to the point of view of non-human beings and the injustices they suffer at the hands of humans. To use the words of eco-theologians writing about biblical texts, the riddles 'may be more sympathetic to the plight […] of Earth than our previous interpretations have allowed.'[6] Read through the sympathetic lens of eco-theology, which considers the point of view of the non-human world and the suffering of the natural world after the Fall, the plight of non-human beings in the riddles becomes very serious indeed. Condemned to a post-lapsarian world of suffering like their human masters, the subjects of the natural world lament their labours and relate narratives of suffering. Reading the riddles in this way, it is impossible to interpret Riddle 72's depiction of the toiling ox as entertaining, unsympathetic or unreal.

I suggest that the depiction of nature's suffering in the Bible may have influenced Riddle 72's depiction of the labouring ox and instigated a new approach to the traditional ox riddle, one that takes into account nature's subjugation to fallen humanity. By lending a voice to the ox and relating the animal's labour and suffering, Riddle 72 interrogates both the predominant anthropocentric views of nature and 'the submerg[ing of] nature into the depths of silence and instrumentality';[7] Riddle 72 draws the animal out of such depths, offering us a speaking subject that laments, and thus

[5] Neville, *Representations*, p. 21.
[6] The Earth Bible Team, 'Guiding Ecojustice Principles', p. 39.
[7] Christopher Manes, 'Nature and Silence', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 15-29 (p. 17).

draws attention to, its life of instrumentality. The difference between manmade object and animal subject in the riddles is sometimes hard to ascertain, as Riddles 4 and 52 show in the variety of proposed solutions.[8] However, I suggest it is possible to distinguish between the two and propose that the ability to distinguish comes from the reader's knowledge of the ox riddle genre and its theological underpinnings in the Exeter Book.

Humanity as Enemy

It has been widely accepted by scholars that, in the Anglo-Saxon imagination, nature was perceived as the enemy to humanity, its destructive power and harsh conditions causing humans to suffer many hardships. Neville's study of the representation of the natural world in Old English poetry has provided an in-depth reading of the negative role nature played in the Anglo-Saxon imagination;[9] but what if humanity could also be perceived as an enemy to nature? More precisely, what if fallen humanity, operating in a sinful, corrupt world, could be seen as an enemy to the created world that it dominates and exploits through its God-given supremacy? When Adam and Eve were cast out of Eden, says Neville, their relationship with the created world underwent a 'complete reversal': where they were once 'granted power over the marvellous new world', they now faced 'subjection to the power of the natural world'.[10] That this is the

[8] Riddle 52 has been solved as 'two buckets' (Dietrich, p. 476 and Wyatt, p. 105), 'flail' (Trautmann, *BBA*, p. 198), and 'two oxen being brought into a barn or house by a female slave' by J. A. Walz in 'Notes on the Anglo-Saxon Riddles', *Harvard Studies and Notes*, 5 (1896), 261-68. Proposed solutions to Riddle 4 include 'millstone' (Dietrich, p. 461), 'bell' (Dietrich, p. 461 and Tupper, *Riddles*, p. 78) and the Devil, as suggested by Heyworth in The Devil's in the Detail: A New Solution to Exeter Book Riddle 4', *Neophilologus*, 91 (2007), 175-96. A. N. Doane suggests 'bucket on a chain or rope in a cistern or well' for Riddle 4, whilst Ray brown suggests 'watchdog'. See Doane, 'Three Old English Implement Riddles: Reconsiderations of Numbers 4, 49, and 73', *Modern Philology*, 84 (1987), 243-57 (p. 247), and Brown, 'The Exeter Book's *Riddle 2*: A Better Solution', *English Language Notes*, 29 (1991), 1-4 (p. 3).

[9] Neville, *Representations*.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 20.

central concept of nature in the Old English *Genesis* and in other Old English poems is irrefutable; in the Old English riddles, however, where hierarchical relationships of various kinds are interrogated, nature can be both an enemy to humanity, as it is in the storm riddles, and be subjected to its mastery, use and abuse.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Neville says of *Genesis* that 'its aim is not to consider the character of the natural world either before or after the Fall', but rather the character of human beings.[11] Many of the riddles have likewise been considered further examples of the Anglo-Saxon exploration, through poetry, of the human condition;[12] but the riddles also explore ideas on the margins of the Anglo-Saxon imagination and challenge and invert traditional concepts of the created world, so the notion that they can depict not just the human condition but the plight of animals and other living things as well is not implausible. Through their unique perspectives, these riddles can be seen to expose nature's suffering in a corrupt, post-lapsarian world and to confront how humanity perceives its own mastery, just as other riddles (e.g. the storm riddles) explore humanity's subjection to nature's power.

Damaged Relationships

'Exploitation', 'shared servitude', 'labour': in a Christian context, these are terms laden with meaning that require more explanation. When God made Adam and Eve, he granted them custodianship of the earth and its creatures, as the Old English *Genesis A* conveys through the following words spoken by God:

> "Inc sceal sealt wæter
> wunian on gewealde and eall worulde gesceaft.
> Brucað blæddaga and brimhlæste
> and heofonfugla. Inc is halig feoh

[11] *Ibid*., p. 20.
[12] As cited in the introduction to this thesis.

and wilde deor on geweald geseald,
and lifigende, ða ðe land tredað,
feoheaceno cynn, ða ðe flod wecceð
geond hronrade. Inc hyrað eall."
(*Gen A*, 198b-205b)[13]

The created world is under the *gewealde* 'dominion' or 'control' of Adam and Eve and they are commanded to *brucað* 'make use of' or 'enjoy' the world's fruits. Similar terms are found in the Latin Vulgate; God commands them both to *subicite* 'subdue' and *dominamini* 'rule over' the earth.[14] After the Fall, God tells Adam and Eve they must *oðerne eðel secean* 'seek another home', a *wynleasran wic* 'more joyless abode' (*Gen A*, 927a-28a), and that they both *winnan scealt* 'must labour' (*Gen A*, 932b). However, He leaves for *frofre* 'comfort' (or 'consolation')

hyrstedne hrof halgum tunglum
and him grundwelan ginne sealde;
het þam sinhiwum sæs and eorðan
tuddorteondra teohha gehwilcre
to woruldnytte wæstmas fedan.
Gesæton þa æfter synne sorgfulre land,
eard and eðyl unspedigran
fremena gehwilcre þonne se frumstol wæs
þe hie æfter dæde of adrifen wurdon.
(*Gen A*, 956a-64b)[15]

[13] 'The salt water and all of the created world shall dwell under the dominion of you two. Make use of fruitful days, and the sea-produce, and the birds of the air. The holy cattle and wild beasts are given into the control of you two, and living things, the races of life-increased things that walk the land, [and] those which the water waken through the sea. All [these things] will obey you.'

[14] *Benedixitque illis Deus, et ait: Crescite et multiplicamini, et replete terram, et subiicite eam, et dominamini piscibus maris, et volatilibus caeli, et universis animantibus, quae moventur super terram.* 'And God blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and all living creatures that move upon the earth.'

[15] 'he gave to them the roof adorned with holy stars and the wide ground-wealth, bid every one of the progeny-producing species of the seas and earth to bring forth their fruit for the pair's worldly need. After their sin they inhabited a more sorrowful land, a dwelling-place and country less bountiful in every kind of benefit than the first home was from which they were driven out after that deed.'

The change in the relationship between Adam and Eve and the rest of creation is subtle but palpable; where the earth was under human dominion before the Fall, it now has to offer up its fruits to feed the pair's *woruldnytte* 'worldly need', that is, the bodily hunger to which, because of the *dæde* 'deed' (i.e. original sin), they are now subject. The land is now *sorgfulre* 'more sorrowful' and less abundant.

Writing in 1967, George Ovitt recognised that Genesis and its early commentaries saw an 'estrangement' between humanity and nature after the Fall, which caused 'natural sovereignty to become less a cooperative partnership, a benign symbiosis, and more a relationship of power and exploitation'.[16] 'Domination and exploitation of nature,' he observes, 'is only necessary after the primordial sin, precisely when Adam has revealed his incapacity in a merely custodial role';[17] or, as Michael S. Northcott says, 'the responsibility of humans for creation is properly described as dominion, but, because of the effects of the Fall, the human dominion over nature has been exercised in sinful and corrupt ways'.[18] In Christian doctrine and its early commentaries, the post-lapsarian world is corrupt and full of affliction; humanity is no longer a caretaker, but an exploiter, who takes from what was previously a fruitful land, as St. Ambrose says: *etsi arata sine cultore esse non poterat – nondum enim erat formatus Agricola – inarata tamen opimis messibus redundabat et haut dobito an maiore proventu siquidem nec cultoris desidia terrarum destituare poterat ubertatem*.[19]

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[16] George Ovitt, 'The Cultural Context of Western Technology: Early Christian Attitudes toward Manual Labor', *Technology and Culture*, 27 (1986), 477-500 (p. 489).
[17] *Ibid*., p. 489.
[18] Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 127.
[19] 'Although [the earth] could not be ploughed in the absence of a cultivator – for the farmer had not yet been created – the earth, though unplowed, teemed with rich harvests, inasmuch as an indolent husbandman did not have occasion to defraud the earth of its abundance.' Latin text from St. Ambrose, *Sancti Ambrosii opera: Pars prima: Exameron, De paradiso, De Cain et Abel, De Noe, De Abraham, De Isaac, De bono mortis*, ed. by C.

The following lines from Basil's *Hexameron*, translated into the Anglo-Saxon by Ælfric, are typical of the treatment of the relationship between humans and non-humans in early Christian texts. Here, Basil reflects upon the nature of humanity before the fall:

> Næs he na geworht mid nanre wohnysse. ne mid nanum synnum gesceapen to menn. ne nane leahtras on his life næron. ac hæfde on his anwealde eall his agen gecynd. butan geswince on gesælðe lybbende. Ne him nan gesceaft næfre ne derode ða hwile ðe he gehyrsumode his scyppende on ryht.[20]

Before the Fall, humanity had a benign relationship with nature's creatures, existing alongside them without causing affliction. It was afterwards that the relationship changed; humans began to abuse their God-given supremacy over all living things and caused nature suffering. Whilst medieval people 'took seriously the biblical charge of assuming dominion over animals',[21] they also recognised the nuance between pre- and post-lapsarian dominion, between custodianship and exploitation.

When God condemned Adam and Eve to a life of labour He condemned the rest of the created world to a similar fate too. 'The fall of Adam affected the entire creation';[22] nature suffered for humanity's sin and could only be released from a life of toil and servitude through humanity's redemption. This concept, found in Paul's *Letter*

Shenkl (London: Vindobonae, 1896), p. 89.Translation from St. Ambrose, *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, trans. by John J. Savage (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1961), p. 99-101.

[20] 'He was not made with any wickedness, nor shaped with any sins for man, nor were there any corruptions in his life, but he had in his control all his own quality, existing without labour in happiness. He never injured a created thing, not one, while he obeyed his creator in the right manner.' Old English citation taken from *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Hexameron of St. Basil; Or,* Be Godes Six Daga Weorcum*; and the Anglo-Saxon Remains of St. Basil's* Admonitio ad filium spiritualem, ed. and trans. by Henry W. Norman (London: John Russell Smith, 1849), pp. 22-3. Translation is my own.

[21] Joyce E. Salisbury, 'Introduction', in *The Medieval World of Nature: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Joyce E. Salisbury (New York: Garland, 1992), p. xi.

[22] Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), p. 332.

to the Romans,[23] was well-known to early theologians, including Augustine,[24] but it enjoys particular creative interpretation in Ambrose's *Hexameron,* which, though less influential, perhaps, than Augustine's work, was still read by important early medieval figures.[25] A passage of particular significance depicts Nature labouring alongside the sun in a post-lapsarian world:

> hac igitur uoce quadam suorum munerum clamat natura: bonus quidem sol, sed ministerio, non inperio, bonus meae fecunditatis adiutor, sed non creator, bonus meorum altor fructum, sed non auctor, interdum partus meos et ipse adurit, frequenter mihi et ipse damno est, plerisque me locis indotatam relinquit. non sum ingrata conseruo, mihi est in usum datus, mecum labori est mancipatus, mecum subiectus est uarutati, mecum corruptionis subditus seruituti. mecum congemescit, mecum parturit, ut ueriat adoption filiorum et humani generis redemptio, quo possimus et nos a seruitio liberari. mecum ad sistens laudat auctorem, mecum hymnum dicit domino deo nostro.[26]

Every part of nature, Ambrose implies, has been condemned to toil for humanity's sin, and release from servitude will only come with humanity's redemption. The Fall has affected every aspect of the created world, not only the relationship between humanity

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[23] Romans 8.20-22. For an in-depth eco-theological discussion of this passage see Brendan Byrne, 'Creation's Groaning: An Earth Bible Reading of Romans 8.18-22', in *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth*, pp. 193-203.

[24] Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms 121-150,* ed. by Boniface Ramsey, trans. by Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 2004), p. 69. Unlike Ambrose, Augustine writes with a particularly anthropocentric view on the condemnation of creation to travail, preferring to discuss the groaning of humankind as opposed to Nature.

[25] Leslie Lockett asserts that the *Hexameron* was known to Aldhelm, Bede, Ælfric, Byrhtferth and the author of *The Exeter Book*'s *The Phoenix*. See Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), p. 216. See also Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 280.

[26] 'With the voice, so to speak, of her gifts does Nature cry out: Good, indeed, is the sun, but good only in respect of service, not of command; good, too, as one who assists at my fecundity, not as one who creates; good, also, as the nourisher of my fruits, not as one who is the author of them. At times, the sun burns up my produce and often is the cause of injury to me, leaving me in many places without provision. I am not ungrateful to my fellow servant, one who is granted to me for my use, subject like me to toil, to vanity, and to the service of corruption! With me he groans, with me he is in travail, in order that there may come the adoption of sons and the redemption of the human race by which we, too, may be freed from servitude. By my side he praises the Author; along with me he sings a hymn to the Lord God.' Latin text from *Sancti Ambrosii* opera, pp. 112-3.Translation from Savage, pp. 128-9.

and nature, but the relationship between all other living and inanimate things. The passage describes the relationship of the sun to the rest of creation, but it is also a lesson for humans; nature's attitude towards the sun acts as an exemplum of how to treat fellow labourers. Humans, like the sun, are better, more useful, to the created world when they assist in ensuring nature's fecundity rather than when they create, when they labour alongside nature, not when they command it. Like nature, humans should not be *ingrata* 'ungrateful' to that which is *usum datus* 'granted [to them] for [their] use'. Read in this way, the passage's message bears a strong resemblance to the eco-theological principle that 'responsible custodians can function as partners, rather than rulers'.[27]

What is also worth noting about the passage from the *Hexameron* is Ambrose's use of anthropomorphism. Ambrose gives Nature a voice – a voice not dissimilar to the voices we hear in the *Exeter Book* riddles – and thus gives the created world apparently human-like qualities. For a brief moment in the *Hexameron*, Ambrose steps out of his own authorial voice and writes from nature's point of view, imagining her perspective on her God-given enslavement. But the anthropomorphic voice is not straightforward – indeed, Ambrose imagines nature speaking not with a literal voice but through her *munerum* 'gifts'. How living things could express themselves was of particular interest to early theologians, including Augustine, and is important to our discussion of the post-lapsarian world of the riddles.

Voices of Suffering

The voices of suffering that readers of Old English are perhaps most familiar with come from elegies such as *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* or *The Wife's Lament*. In these

[27] The Earth Bible Team, 'Six Ecojustice Principles', p. 24.

poems, the individuals lament their misfortunes through a type of monologue, reflecting on their happy pasts and bemoaning the conditions in which they now live, including their suffering as victims of nature's onslaughts. Beyond them, we encounter the groan of the ploughman in Ælfric's *Colloquy*, whose toil is heavy and whose servitude is inescapable. It is a rare voice from the borders of society, the voice of a slave, granted expression through a Latin exercise designed for students. In the Old English riddles, animals and other living things often vocalise their own misfortunes in what is perhaps the only place in Anglo-Saxon literature for these marginalised perspectives. In a number of riddles, the medium of poetry allows the subjects to bemoan their fates, in a way not dissimilar to the elegies.

'When [certain Old English] riddles are performed,' says Mary Hayes, 'their first-person narratives engage the reader in lending a voice to the animals that have been killed and skinned to produce the written text';[28] in turn, the reader 'does a great service to the deceased animals by speaking for them'.[29] Hayes focuses her attention on Riddle 26, but the premise would also be applicable to Riddle 72, whereby the reader lends a voice to the suffering ox, allowing the ox to express its suffering with the same emotional charge as the labourer in Ælfric's colloquy. As with many studies of the non-human in the riddles, Hayes later countermands the eco-centric potential of her reading by taking a decidedly anthropocentric turn, arguing (somewhat unconvincingly) that who the reader really lends her voice to is the deceased author.[30] What can be drawn from her article for the present study, however, is the idea that reader performance can act as an aid, a medium of expression, for what would

[28] Mary Hayes, 'The Talking Dead: Resounding Voices in Old English Riddles', *Exemplaria*, 20 (2008) 123–142 (p. 124). A version of this article can be found in Mary Hayes, *Divine Ventriloquism in Medieval English Literature: Power, Anxiety, Subversion* (London: Palgrave, 2011), pp. 25-52.
[29] *Ibid*., p. 126.
[30] *Ibid*., p. 126.

otherwise be silent figures. In order to create texts with performative potential, the writers use prosopoeia and personification to allow non-humans to speak. Through the use of literary devices that 'permit non-human subjects to describe themselves',[31] riddles break the silence of nature that human language and culture has created and make its creatures very much 'alive and articulate'.[32]

The riddles introduce a difference between self-expression through the imaginative medium of poetry and self-expression in the 'real' world they are said to inhabit, and this difference can be described as an interplay between literal and metaphorical modes of speech.[33] The paradoxical nature of a dumb object being able to communicate through written or carved words is suggested in Riddle 60, where the rune-staff *muðleas sprecan* 'mouthless speaks' (R. 60, 9b).[34] A similar interplay between modes of speech can be found in areas of Christian doctrine, where living things can be simultaneously dumb and vocal. In both the riddles and biblical texts, communication can extend beyond the written word, recorded in books or engraved on objects,[35] to beauteous outward testaments of God's glory, from rich jewels on human creations to the petals on a flower.[36] A question of importance to early Christian thinkers was: how do animals and other living things communicate their suffering? All created things are said to be able to praise God and, similarly, to 'groan in travail'; but how, precisely? The question of how a dumb stone or dumb animal could speak

[31] Marie Nelson, 'The Paradox of Silent Speech in the Exeter Book Riddles', *Neophilologus*, 62 (1978), 609-15.
[32] Manes, p. 15.
[33] Nelson discusses this interplay as a paradox in 'Silent Speech'.
[34] For further discussion of this paradox see Earl R. Anderson, 'Voices in the "Husband's Message"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 74 (1973), 238-46.
[35] A chalice can communicate a message through its engravings – in Riddle 59 the chalice *cwæð* 'spoke' through its *benne* 'wounds' (R. 59, 5b & 12a) – whilst a rune staff can speak through its carvings. In Riddle 60 it is said that *seaxes ord* 'knife's point' and *swiþre hond* 'right hand' allow the object to *ærendspræce / abeodan bealdlice* 'boldly announce [its] message' (R. 60, 12a-16a).
[36] The Bible of Riddle 26 speaks through its adornments – the *gereno* 'adornments', *reada telg* 'red dye' and *wuldorgesteald* 'glorious possessions' *wide mære / dryhtfolca helm* 'widely proclaim the people's protection' (R. 26, 15a-16a). Hayes is incorrect when she says that Riddle 26's Bible is one of the collection's two sacramental objects 'claiming to speak through their written inscriptions' (p. 124).

concerned Augustine in his *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. In his exposition of Psalm 144, he ponders how non-humans can praise God if they do not have a voice:

> Proinde quid accipiendum: Confiteantur tibi, Domine, omnia opera tua? Laudent te omnia opera tua. Se talis quaestio redit ad laudem, qualis erat in confessione. Si enim propterea confiteri non poterunt terra, ligna et quaeque insensata, quia uocem non habent confitendi; ideo nec laudabunt, quia uocem non habent praedicanti. Nonne tamen omnia tres illi pueri enumerant, deambulantes inter flammas innoxias; quibus spatium erat, non solum non ardendi, sed etiam laudandi Deum? Omnibus dicunt a caelestibus usque ad terrena: Benedicte, hymnum dicite, et superexultate eum in saecula.[37]

The solution to this problem was to recognise that non-human things could find expression through a figurative mode of speech, not through a literal human-like voice. As we saw in the Ambrose quotation, nature speaks through her *munerum* 'gifts', not through literal speech. Ambrose's anthropomorphic depiction is, then, an imaginative exploration of what this voice might say if nature had human intellect and could voice her perspective on her enslavement. Nature is thus anthropomorphic, yet is also able to retain some of her original nature, as dumb and without human intellect.

'It is no less problematic to speak of the voice of the Earth than to speak of the voice of God,' argues the Earth Bible Team.[38] To understand what, precisely, this voice

[37] 'How, then, are we to understand the psalm's prayer, *Let all your works confess to you, O Lord?* It means, "Let all your works praise you." But to say that is only to raise again in connection with praise the same question we encountered with reference to confession. If the earth, the trees, and all other creatures that lack understanding are to be judged incapable of confession because they have no voice to confess with, they must be equally incapable of praising God, because they have no voice to proclaim him. But then what about all the creatures that the three youths enumerated as they walked about amid flames that did not hurt them? They enjoyed not only freedom from being burnt but also freedom to praise God, and they exhorted all creatures, from the highest heaven down to the earth*, Bless him, sing a hymn, and exalt him above all for ever*.' Latin text from Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos CI-CL*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 40, ed. by E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont (Turnhout: Brepols, 1956), p. 2098. Translation from Rotelle, *Expositions of the Psalms 121-150,* p. 391.

[38] The Earth Bible Team, 'The Voice of the Earth: More than Metaphor?', in *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*, pp. 23-28 (p. 24).

is and how it differs from a human voice we can turn, once again, to our modern eco-theologians. Returning to the six principles of eco-theology discussed in this study's introduction, we find an explanation for how voice in Christian doctrine can be interpreted:

> The third principle of *voice* claims that the earth is capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice. This is not the same as the human voice, for if so, it would be an anthropocentrism that is contrary to the other principles [of eco-theology]. Rather, it is seeking to pay attention to what the earth might have to say, to viewing the earth in *kinship* with rather than in alienation from humanity.[39]

Ambrose, I suggest, is similarly 'paying attention' to the earth's perspective and uses anthropomorphism as a tool for exploring nature's suffering. Using anthropomorphism in this way, as a tool for exploring an intangible voice, makes the created world familiar to humanity as opposed to 'alien', whilst still preserving the living thing as a separate entity to humans, a non-intelligent being. It simultaneously allows humans to gain access to nature's perspective whilst also allowing nature to resist complete assimilation into the world of human beings. 'Speaking for nature,' says S. Alaimo, 'can be yet another form of silencing, as nature is blanketed in the human voice',[40] but the simple act of reminding the reader that the creature cannot literally speak alerts us to the essential nature of the non-human subject and to the presence of the human voice in the text, without affecting the voice's impact.

The riddles achieve a dualism of familiarity and difference in their depictions of speech and silence. In Riddle 72, for example, the living thing is given an

[39] Deane-Drummond, p. 89.
[40] S. Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 182.

anthropomorphic voice, but also describes itself as *swigade* 'silent' (R. 72, 15b). This acknowledgement of its silence would seem to be the author's way of making the distinction between the subject having a literal (human) voice and it having an imagined voice imposed on it by the author, or, as Nelson says, 'the riddle is merely a speech which presents silence as a characteristic mode of behaviour'.[41] A similar distinction can be observed within two tree riddles, Riddles 53 and 73, the former of which is written in third-person and the latter in first-person. The tree in Riddle 73 is given a voice with which to relate its suffering, whilst the tree in Riddle 53 is said to be *dumb in bendum* 'dumb in fetters' (R. 53, 6b).[42] A tree can thus relate its suffering through the medium of poetry, or through a reader's performance of that text, but in actuality it cannot speak. Jerome Denno talks of the subjects' expression through speech as an 'imaginative dislocation inherent in riddles' and says the 'newly vocal tree', for example, 'uses that poetically conferred power to speak of its oppression'.[43] This situation is not dissimilar to that of nature in Ambrose's *Hexameron,* who has been given a similar power to speak of her oppression. Anthropomorphism, we can summarise, is a way for the author to explore 'what the earth might have to say'[44] rather than give it human qualities, a careful navigation between 'voluble subject' and 'mute object'.[45] It is both an imaginative exploration of how the groan of travail might sound and a drawing out of nature from a culture-induced silence.

[41] Nelson, 'Silent Speech', p. 610.
[42] Further examples can be found in Nelson's 'Silent Speech', including examples from Riddle 85 ('fish and river') and Riddle 60 ('reed staff') and Riddle 48 ('chalice'). See pages 610-14.
[43] Jerome Denno, 'Oppression and Voice in the Anglo-Saxon Riddle Poems', *CEA Critic*, 70 (2007), 35-47 (p. 43).
[44] Deane-Drummond, p. 89.
[45] Manes, p. 17.

Suffering and Servitude in the Ox Riddles

Having explored the damaged relationship between humanity and nature and the voices of suffering associated with it, let us see how these concepts can be applied to the Old English ox riddles. There are three riddles in the Exeter Book whose solutions are widely accepted as 'ox', and these are Riddles 12, 38 and 72. Two more riddles, 4 and 52, have also been solved as 'ox' or 'oxen', although these are notoriously obscure riddles and have been variously interpreted over the years.[46] The first section of this discussion will focus primarily on Riddles 38 and 72, and will be followed by a discussion of Riddles 4 and 52. The aim of the latter discussion is to discover why the enslaved animal can be found within riddles that have also been solved as various objects for human use and what this says about humanity's relationship with the natural world.[47]

The three established ox riddles each develop the Latin riddles of Aldhelm and Eusebius, and their expansion into what can be considered a distinct riddle genre has been studied by Dieter Bitterli. Each riddle, Bitterli says, 'manifests a different intertextual access to the Latin *enigmata* and exemplifies the manner in which the Old English poet(s) succeeded in rewriting their sources';[48] the poets 'transform' the sources into 'something genuine and new'.[49] Bitterli presents a concise study of these transformations, but does not provide any in-depth analysis of the themes of suffering or slavery. In particular, he does not acknowledge the Old English ox riddles' development of the master-slave relationship between human and animal, and the focus on suffering and servitude in Riddle 72. This particular focus, I suggest, is the

[46] The scholarship will be discussed later in this chapter.
[47] The much-discussed Riddle 12 will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4.
[48] Dieter Bitterli, *Say What I Am Called: The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book and the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), p. 27.
[49] *Ibid*., p. 34.

agenda that drives the development of the ox riddle genre and requires further investigation. Drawing on both the central imagery of their Latin sources and concepts of suffering after the Fall, the Old English riddle writers develop the ox riddle into an anxious reflection on the relationship between human and animal, master and slave. In doing so, the poets depict a world that is not governed by a 'benign symbiosis'[50] but rather a post-lapsarian dystopia of enslavement and affliction. In the early period of medieval history, the ox had a close and relatively unique relationship with humans, one that involved the sharing of a heavy toil in the fields, and the yoke to which the oxen are attached provides a useful metonym for their enslavement and servitude, acting as both harness and shackle.

Let us begin by taking a look at one of the key sources for the Old English ox riddles, Aldhelm's Riddle 83 'Iuvencus'. Aldhelm describes the ox's life through the stages of nurture, labour and afterlife:[51]

> Arida spumosis dissolvens faucibus ora
> Bis binis bibulus potum de fontibus hausi.
> Vivens nam terræ glebas cum stirpibus imis
> Nisu virtutis validæ disrumpo feraces;
> At vero linquit dum spiritus algida membra,
> Nexibus horrendis homines constringere possum.[52]

[50] Ovitt, p. 489.

[51] I use the term 'afterlife' to literally mean the life the creature has after death, without any of the afterlife's usual spiritual connotations. This has also been called the '"living-dead" antithesis' by Bitterli (p. 28). A more detailed discussion of the 'afterlife' in the riddles can be found in Chapter 3.

[52] 'My mouth I moisten through my foaming jaws,
When drink from twice two fountains I have gulped.
During my life, by huge and mighty strength
I break the fertile soil, and root up stumps;
But when the breath has left my icy limbs,
I then can bind strong men in fearful bonds.' Both text and translation are taken from *The Riddles of Aldhelm: Text and Verse Translation with Notes*, ed. and trans. by James Hall Pitman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1925; repr. North Haven, CT: Archon Book, 1970), pp. 50-51.

The image here is one of an ox suckling from its mother and then ploughing the earth until death, when it gets made into clothing for humans. There is an emphasis on the ox's strength throughout; this is an animal with vigour, a vigour which continues into its afterlife. This animal even comes across as a creature to be feared and as one who enjoys a position of dominance over both the earth (in life) and humans (in death). There is no sense of the animal as an enslaved beast and, whilst we can assume that the activity the creature engages in during its life is ploughing, there is no mention of a yoke or harness or even a herdsman and goad. Indeed, humans are only mentioned in the closing lines, and here it is the ox doing the binding, in *horrendis* 'fearful' bonds, not humans. The same, too, can be said of Eusebius' ox riddle, which, as Bitterli observes, is very similar in style and structure to Aldhelm's Riddle 83.[53]

When we turn to Exeter Book Riddle 38 we find the creature depicted in a similar way:

> Ic þa wiht geseah wæpnedcynnes
> geoguðmyrþe grædig; him on gafol forlet
> ferðfriþende feower wellan
> scire sceotan, on gesceap þeotan.
> Mon maþelade, se þe me gesægde:
> "Seo wiht, gif hio gedygeð, duna briceð;
> gif he tobirsteð, bindeð cwice."
> (R. 38, 1a-7b)[54]

The ox is of the *wæpnedcynnes* 'weaponed race', the terminology lending martial connotations to the beast, and is said to be *grædig* 'greedy' in *geoguðmyrþe* 'the joy of youth'. The author characterises it with the same lustiness that Aldhelm grants to his ox; there are, however, two obvious changes to the source text, namely, the use

[53] Bitterli, p. 28.

[54] 'I saw a creature of the weaponed race, greedy in the joy of youth; the life sustaining one allowed tribute to shoot brightly for him from four life-sustaining springs, in the shape of fountains. A man spoke who said to me, "This creature, if he endures, will break moors, if he breaks, he will bind the living"'.

of the third-person narrator and the addition of speech in the closing lines. The ox is robbed of its personal perspective, which is given to an unknown observer, whilst it is a *mon* 'man' who makes a spoken observation about the ox's two possible fates. Ebert has suggested that this man is Aldhelm or Eusebius, which would seem to be the writer's acknowledgment of the ox riddle sources,[55] whilst Bitterli similarly states that the riddle would seem to be 'engaged in an inter-textual dialogue with its Latin predecessors'.[56] Williamson, however, suggests that 'line 5 serves rather to set up a dramatic situation, a speech act within the riddle, in order to lend emphasis to the concluding paradox'.[57] These are both attractive possibilities, but I suggest that this speech act is primarily concerned with introducing humans into the world of living creatures. The Old English riddles are particularly interested in how the human individual interacts with the world, and to use both spoken and visual observations in this riddle suggests a desire to comprehend the ox from the human perspective. Through the speech act, the ox riddle becomes a dialogue in which humans can participate; through it, humanity gains some authority, where in Aldhelm's riddle it has none.

It is in Riddle 72 where we get a reversal of this anthropocentric view and are able to perceive the animal's plight from its own unique perspective. When we turn to Riddle 72, we find the ox's first-person perspective restored, but the ox is not the virile creature of Aldhelm's riddle, and is instead lowly and afflicted; it is 'thoroughly tamed', as Tupper describes it.[58] This is a riddle where master and harness are present, and the relationship between human and beast becomes the riddle's focus. That the text is a conscious development of its Latin source is clear from its use of the same suckling

[55] Adolf Ebert, 'Die Rätselpoesie der Angelsachsen', *BudV*, 29 (1877), 20-56 (p. 50, note).
[56] Bitterli, p. 30.
[57] Williamson, *Riddles*, p. 255.
[58] Tupper, *Riddles*, p. 211.

trope in its opening lines. The ox-narrator describes how he suckled from his mother; he *teah* 'drew' on her teats – described as his four *swæse broþer* 'sweet brothers' – and these, in turn, *drincan sealde* 'supplied drink' *þurh þyrel* 'through a hole' (R. 72, 5b-8a). This is a scene of nurturing and contentment; but it is embedded in a larger narrative that details the ox's transition from joyful youth to painful maturity. There is little doubt that what the author depicts is a situation in a post-lapsarian world, with an awareness of the damaged relationship between human and beast and of nature's condemnation to toil.

The scene of nurture and contentment is soon interrupted by the introduction of the herdsman. The narrator says that when he became *yldra* 'older' he was employed by a *sweartum hyrde* 'swarthy shepherd' (R. 72, 8b-10a) and had to *mearcpaþas træd* 'tread boundary-paths' with his master (R. 72, 11a-12a).[59] The ox will not experience with the herdsman the same sense of kinship he experienced in his youth, when the natural world provided him with familial relations. We might envisage this *hyrde* as the figure from Ælfric's *Colloquy* who laments his heavy work in the fields with his oxen; he may enslave the oxen, but he must also groan in travail. The relationship has faint echoes, too, of nature's opinion of the sun in Ambrose's *Hexameron*: *non sum ingrata conseruo, mihi est in usum datus, mecum labori est mancipatus, mecum subiectus est uarutati*.[60] Whilst we can assume that there is a shared labour between human and beast, however, it is significant that Riddle 72 does not depict the human travail in any detail; it is the animal's plight the writer is interested in representing.

[59] I follow Williamson's emendation of the manuscript reading *mearcpaþas Walas træd*. For the metrical problems of the manuscript text see Williamson, *Riddles*, p. 344. Krapp and Dobbie suggest that *paþas* and *walas* 'represented two attempts attempts by the scribe to reproduce a partly illegible word' (ASPR, III, p. 370).
[60] 'I am not ungrateful to my fellow servant who is subject like me to toil, to vanity, and to the service of corruption'.

The ox is in a state of servitude and we are made aware that a human is his master. In order to carry out his laborious work, the ox is *bunden under beame* 'bound under beam' and has a *beag* 'shackle' round his neck.[61] The description of the ox's attachment to the equipment stands for his enslavement, a symbol that is absent from Aldhelm's riddle. The ox's lifestyle during its adult years is one of pain and misery; the ox describes how, in *wean on laste* 'the track of sorrow', it

> weorc þrowade,
> earfoða dæl. Oft mec isern scod
> sare on sidan; ic swigade,
> næfre meldade monna ængum,
> gif me ordstæpe egle wæron.
> (R. 72, 13b-17b)[62]

There is significant emphasis on pain and suffering here, and this emphasis goes beyond the detail necessary for the construction of a riddle, for the concealment of an answer and its clues. The riddle moves from the traditional and playfully ambiguous depiction of suckling to a relatively long narration on the ox's suffering, which is largely bereft of ambiguity and playful language. The specificity of the location of the ox's labour, the Welsh boundary-paths, along with the unconcealed identity of the master and the detailing of the equipment, work together to rob the riddle of its opening ambiguity. The satisfaction of the reader in terms of solving the riddle is likely to be less than that felt for solving those riddles that are more challenging in nature.[63] But the overall effect of the increasing lack of ambiguity is to make the riddle less about the discovery of the answer and more about the ox's plight. Rather than gaining a

[61] Melanie Heyworth has provided a useful study of the connotations of the term *beag* in 'The Devil's in the Detail', p. 183. I have chosen 'shackle' as it best depicts the metaphorical nature of the harness as a tool of oppression.

[62] 'endured pain, a load of hardships. Often iron sorely injured me on my side; I was silent, never told any man if the spear-goads were painful.'

[63] The list is too long to discuss here, and is always going to be largely subjective, but Riddles 4 and 52 certainly belong to this category, as we will see in the next section.

sense of self-achievement through discovering the solution, the reader gains an increased awareness of the plight of the ox and of humanity's relationship with the enslaved animal. In this sense, the riddle adopts Aldhelm's method of creating 'mysteries' instead of riddles in order to 'lead the reader to contemplate God's creation afresh'.[64]

Riddle 72 depicts a 'groan of travail', drawing on the concept of the damaged relationship between humans and animals after the fall. Humans take the ox out of its pleasant, Eden-like environment, constrain it and use it to work the land. Enslaved, the ox is driven on by an *ordstæpe* 'spear-goad', described as *egle* 'painful' to him. Humans, in their post-lapsarian state, do not have mere custody over the creature of this riddle but mastery, and this mastery is not benign; in this post-lapsarian world, humans wound their fellow creatures, while in the pre-lapsarian world they *nan gesceaft næfre ne derode* 'never injured any created thing, not one'.

The plight of an object or animal features in a number of the Old English riddles, but Riddle 72 interpolates characteristics of a particular Old English literary genre that sets it apart from them. Bitterli has called the riddle a 'mournful soliloquy [...] whose language and mood is reminiscent of the so-called Old English elegies, with their melancholy accounts of personal misfortune, separation, and exile, and their nostalgic recollections of a happier past'.[65] This is an attractive observation, with more to be said about it than Bitterli offers us. The focus of the elegies is on the human condition, and it is therefore noteworthy that the same generic formula is used to explore the 'animal' condition in Riddle 72. The elegies depict humans facing the elements to which, because of the Fall, they are now subject; in a reversal of role, Riddle 72 depicts the

[64] Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature*, p. 9.
[65] Bitterli, p. 34.

ox as subjugated under humans in a post-lapsarian world. The riddle is thus a play on the traditional elegy, revealing the plight of the ox at the hands of human beings; it is an unusual twist, but certainly acceptable in the realms of the Old English riddles.[66] What is more, like the pious figures of the elegies, the ox endures his suffering stoically, perhaps more stoically, since he is 'silent' in his torment.

The notion that Riddle 72 is elegiac becomes even more interesting when we reflect that the elegies are religious in theme and depict the narrator's aspirations towards a better life in heaven, away from earth's sorrows. Unlike the subjects of the elegies, the ox cannot anticipate an afterlife in the realm of heaven, but, after death, must instead be turned into an object for human use. This seems to be both an inversion of the elegy tradition and a way for humans, as a spiritual beings, to set themselves apart from the rest of creation. Humans are defined as having souls and can strive to exchange the earthly world for the Heavenly City. In contrast, the only afterlife the ox will experience is a rebirth into the material world as a leather object, the nature of which we are able glean from Riddles 38 and 12. Death brings to the creature a different sort of servitude, and a great many other afflictions and humiliations at the hands of humans. In Riddle 12, the ox's hide is turned into different objects – clothing, a drink sack and shoes – and eventually finds its way into the hands of a maidservant who puts it to an entirely different use.[67]

[66] Some riddles have been said, for example, to depict the 'mock-heroic', thus perverting our expectations of another literary genre. This topic has been discussed by Jennifer Neville in 'Redeeming Beowulf: The Heroic Idiom as Marker of Quality in Old English Poetry', in *Narration and Hero: Recounting the Deeds of Heroes in Literature and Art of the Early Medieval Period*, ed. by Victor Millet and Heike Sahm, Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, 87 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 45-69 (pp. 55-59).
[67] The possible interpretations of its final use are discussed in Chapter 4.

Riddles 4 and 52: Two More Ox Riddles?

Having explored concepts of servitude and suffering, there are two riddles, 4 and 52, that have been solved as both ox and object, and as such demonstrate how distinctions between animate and inanimate are sometimes difficult to determine in these texts. It seems important that we explore these riddles here – not only to decipher whether they are indeed ox riddles but, more importantly, to consider why it is that readers find it difficult to distinguish a human's employment of an animal from his or her employment of an object. If readers cannot determine if the subjects of these riddles are living creatures or non-sentient objects, questions should be raised about how humanity perceives its relationship with the natural world, as well as what we understand about the ox riddle genre. According to Val Plumwood, '[objects are] empty vessels to be filled with another's purpose and will'[68] – is this how the Anglo-Saxons viewed domestic animals, too, or can we distinguish between objects and animals in the riddles? Is nature above pure 'instrumentality'?[69]

As we move from Riddle 72 to Riddles 4 and 52, we move from a relatively transparent text to texts that are more ambiguous in nature. Taking Riddle 52 first, we find that what was superfluous to finding the answer in Riddle 72 – namely, the detailing of the ox's enslavement – is nearly all we have to interpret in this notably vague riddle. To an extent, the riddle relies on the solver's knowledge of master-servant relationships to help find the solution, and this reliance becomes more noticeable as we work through the riddle.

[68] Plumwood, p. 46.
[69] Manes, p. 17.

Only J. A. Walz has put forward 'oxen' as the answer,[70] with other editors preferring 'two-buckets' or 'flail';[71] but, as Williamson observes, a 'lack of detail provides problems for almost any solution'.[72] Specifically, Walz suggests that the riddle depicts 'a yoke of oxen led into a barn by a female slave'.[73] To understand this interpretation, let us look at the riddle in full:

> Ic seah ræpingas in ræced fergan
> under hrof sales hearde twegen
> þa wæron genumne, nearwum bendum,
> gefeterade fæste togædre.
> Þara oþrum wæs an getenge
> wonfah Wale, seo weold hyra
> bega siþe bendum fæstra.
> (R. 52, 1a-7b)[74]

If we accept Walz's solution, we imagine the oxen to be roped up together and taken into a barn, called a *ræced* in the riddle. *Ræced* translates as 'hall', 'house' or 'palace', but it is certainly plausible that the writer chose the term to give the oxen's shelter some ambiguity, thus working to conceal the solution from the reader. Equally plausible is the number of oxen, since two-oxen 'scratch-ploughs' were used in early medieval times when eight-oxen plough teams were not available.[75] The oxen would be driven

[70] Walz, p. 266.
[71] For buckets see, for example, F. Dietrich, 'Die Räthsel des Exeterbuchs: Wurdigüng, Lösung, und Herstellung,' *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, 11 (1859), 448-90. For flail see M. Trautmann, 'Zu den altenglischen Rätseln', *Anglia*, 17 (1895), 396-400; and F. Tupper, 'Solutions of the *Exeter Book Riddles*', *MLN*, 21 (1906), 97-105.
[72] Williamson, *Riddles*, p. 296.
[73] Walz, p. 266.
[74] 'I saw two hard roped captives conducted under the roof of the building; they were taken away, held together by close bonds. Hard-pressing one of the two of them was a dark-haired Welshwoman; she commanded them both on their journey, securely bound.'
[75] See Michael Partridge, *Farm Tools Through the Ages* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1973), p. 37. There has been much on-going debate about the use of eight-oxen ploughs, however. See Peter Fowler, *Farming in the First Millennium AD: British Agriculture Between Julius Caesar and William the Conqueror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 183-4. For further discussion of the use of oxen in farming see also Debby Banham and Rosamund Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms and Farming* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 51-54.

into the barn, with the woman goading one of the two of them, possibly with a goad stick, although this is not mentioned in the riddle itself. The presence of the woman can be explained by the possibility that she would not necessarily have been out in the fields labouring but helping to bring the oxen in afterwards.

A contemporary response to Walz's solution dismissed it not primarily for the plausibility of the situation, but because it is 'too easily and literally suited by the terms of the riddle; it is too obvious, and fails to call forth that pleasant surprise which should follow the disclosure of the answer'.[76] This is an interesting response when one considers the ease with which the largely unambiguous Riddle 72 can be solved. Riddle 72 shows that sometimes a 'pleasant surprise' is not always the effect the riddles strive to have on the reader. Equally important to the riddles seems to be their thematic import which, in the case of Riddle 72, is the relationship between human and animal. Thus it is possible to see Riddle 52 as similar to Riddle 72 in its focus on relationships above the answer itself. If this is the case, the answer 'oxen' does not have to be dismissed purely on the grounds of audience 'pleasure'.

Only when two oxen are envisaged as the two roped captives does the thematic import of the riddle become clear; but how does the reader come to take these creatures as the solution? To find the solution, the reader might take his or her cue from the opening *ic seah*, which might recall to the reader's mind the opening of Riddle 38 (although it should be noted that the same opening has been used for a number of other riddles), or from the slave character that features in the other three ox riddles (here a *wonfah Wale*). Significantly, these slaves appear only in these riddles, not in riddles about objects. Objects, 'filled with another's purpose and will',[77] tend to work

[76] George A. Wood, 'The Anglo-Saxon Riddles', *Aberystwyth Studies,* 2–3 (1912), pp. 9-64 (p. 17). Waltz himself admits that the solution 'smacks of fatal obviousness' (p. 185).
[77] Plumwood, p. 46.

for a lord or thegn rather than a fellow slave; in Riddle 21, for example, the plough serves a *hlaford* 'lord', rather than a ploughman or slave. The lexis of slavery, which includes terms that suggest captivity and oppression, can also act as an aid to finding the solution. The oxen, the reader gathers, have been tied up *hearde* 'hard' together ('hard' also having connotations of 'cruel' or 'harsh') and are then *genamnan* 'taken' under the roof. The woman, we understand, *weold* 'commanded' the oxen to go on their journey, just as the boy does in the *Colloquy*, *þypende* 'spurring' the oxen on their way and making himself *has* 'hoarse' from *hreame* 'shouting'. One is unlikely verbally to command an object to go on its course, although *weold*, it should be noted, could mean 'governed' or 'willed'.

Riddle 72 represents the ox as burdened by its work, fettered and wounded by the ploughman and by the equipment used for ploughing fields. Riddle 52 strips away the layers of detail in a similar scenario and relies on the relationship between two slaves – human and animal – to provide the clues. Riddle solvers, however, may only be able to supply the answer if they are attuned to the developments the ox riddle genre, including the inversion of Aldhelm's strong, virile beast into a lowly, afflicted ox, and the introduction, in Riddle 72, of a relationship based on both shared servitude and oppression.

The other riddle to be solved as 'ox' is Riddle 4, perhaps the 'most puzzling riddle in the Exeter Book'.[78] Specifically, Shannon Ferri Cochran's solution is 'plough team', but the riddle is told from the perspective of one of the eight beasts.[79] The logic of Cochran's solution is complex and has certain drawbacks,[80] and instead of feeling 'pleasant surprise' at learning the answer, the reader is likely to experience a feeling

[78] Williamson, *Riddles*, p. 141.
[79] Cochran, 'The Plough's the Thing'.
[80] To be discussed later in this section.

of further puzzlement. The general narrative structure and tone of the riddle are different to the other ox riddles, yet, surprisingly, it does seem to assimilate some characteristics of our other ox riddles. These include the theme of hardship, the hostile relationship between human and creature, and the references to voice and communication. However, as we shall see, we are still left wondering by the end of the text whether this 'creature' is animal or object, sentient or non-sentient.

Let us first consider the opening line and the theme of hardship. Here is Riddle 4 in full:

> Ic sceal þragbysig þegne minum,
> hringum hæfted, hyran georne,
> min bed brecan, breahtme cyðan
> þæt me halswriþan hlaford sealde.
> Oft mec slæpwerigne secg oðþe meowle
> gretan eode; ic him gromheortum
> winterceald oncweþe. Wearm lim
> gebundenne bæg hwilum bersteð,
> seþeah biþ on þonce þegne minum,
> medwisum men, me þæt sylfe,
> þær wiht wite ond wordum min
> on sped mæge spel gesecgan.
> (R. 4, 1a–12b)[81]

Perhaps surprisingly, Cochran does not linger on the term *þragbysig* in her study, taking it simply as 'descriptive of the plough team's seasonal obligations'.[82] Yet Heyworth's nuanced reading of the term reveals that, as well as 'present[ing] multiple possibilities of meaning', it 'introduces a sense of the potential for negativity in this riddle'.[83] Heyworth suggests that *þrag* can mean 'evil time', and goes on to suggest

[81] 'At times, bound by rings, I must zealously obey my thegn, break my bed, loudly proclaim that a lord furnished me with a neck ring. Often my sleep-weary self a man or maiden went to greet; I respond to the grim-hearted ones, winter-cold. A warm limb sometimes bursts the bound fetter. This, though, is pleasing to my thegn, foolish man, and to me too, if I am conscious of anything, and with words can skilfully tell [my] story.'
[82] Cochran, p. 305.
[83] Heyworth, 'The Devil's in the Detail', p. 177.

that ‘the noun *bysig*, too, may have negative connotations, for busyness was associated with hard labour and *bysig* can thus denote being “troubled”, “anxious”, just as the related verb *(ge)bysgian* has the connotations of “to trouble”, “to afflict”’.[84] This reading would echo the plight of the ox in Riddle 72, potentially linking Riddle 4 to the ox riddle genre. *Winterceald*, the ox is, according to Cochran, either ‘weary *for* sleep’, or ‘weary for *more* sleep, when it is awakened in the morning for ploughing’.[85] This would seem to reflect something of the coldness of the ox in Aldhelm’s riddle where the ox is described as having *algida membra* ‘icy limbs’. Ploughing usually happens in the winter months, so it would be apt for the ox to be cold.

The ox’s routine is an unhappy one, and this is conveyed through first-person narration as well as through vocalisations made in the text itself. According to Cochran’s translation, the creature *breahtme cyðan* ‘reveal[s] with a cry’ that it has been harnessed to a plough, possibly in protestation or discomfort. ‘One can imagine,’ says Cochran, ‘how much the ox might huff and snort, unhappy to be burdened in such a way’ (although it should be noted that the riddle writer does not mention any suffering in relation to this cry).[86] If it is a verbal proclamation of affliction, it is an interesting contrast to the lack of vocalisation in Riddle 72, where the ox *næfre meldade monna ængum* ‘never announced to any man’ that it was in pain. *Meldade* and *cyðan* have very similar connotation, sharing the meanings ‘announce’, ‘declare’, ‘proclaim’, which strengthens their relationship across the poems. Cochran suggests that this cry is the sound that an ox makes, not human speech, and the creature’s inability to speak in human words outside of the riddle is confirmed in the final lines. Cochran translates lines 11a-12b as ‘if I could know anything and say my story successfully in words’, a

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 177.
[85] Cochran, p. 306.
[86] *Ibid.*, p. 305.

reaction which, she observes, is necessarily 'different from a man's, since an ox has no consciousness and therefore "cannot know anything" (l. 11a) or "speak its story in words" (ll. 11b-12b)'.[87] Like Riddle 72, the ox is given freedom through the medium of poetry to 'speak', but, the writer reminds us, it is, in actuality, dumb and without sense.

As in Riddles 72 and 52, the relationship with humanity is an unhappy one. The only respite the ox will get is when the wheel breaks and the ox can enjoy some rest along with the boy. As Cochran explains:

> The boy or "thane" is happy because he can rest while the ploughman (*hlaford*) fixes the plough. The boy is "foolish" (*medwisum men,* l. 10a) because he cannot make the repairs himself and because he will still have to finish the work, no matter the delay. The ox, too, is happy […] One can easily imagine its relief when freed from the plough while the wheel is under repair.[88]

Cochran's proposed narrative is preceded by an investigation into the terms *beag* and *lim*, and an amendment of line 7b, which leads her to conclude that the mud (*lim*) *byrsteð* 'breaks' the wheel (*beag*). This is undoubtedly the most questionable part of the theory, with some logical oversights and textual amendments made in order for the narrative to work;[89] nevertheless, the theory would adeptly explain the perplexing use of 'foolish' to describe the thegn and is one of the more convincing arguments for why an action or event should please both a master and a servant together. This part of the riddle would seem to offer a different aspect to the ox's relationship with humans in the

[87] *Ibid*., p. 309.
[88] *Ibid*., pp. 308-9.
[89] One of the main flaws, suggested by Murphy, is that mud (the *lim*) cannot be warm (*wearm*) in January, the proposed ploughing month (p. 76). The solution's narrative also requires an emendation of line 7b (*gefehð* – 'grips'), which Cochran explains in a note was a 'plausible' suggestion made by Robert D. Fulk, following Trautmann's suggestion of a missing verb, but a word which we cannot be certain was intended by the riddle writer (*BBA*, p. 302).

riddle genre, providing some further insight into the nature of shared labour; but, because of the theory's flaws, it is difficult to probe this further.

Cochran sees those who wake the oxen up as 'fierce greeters' and says that the subsequent use of *gromheortum* suggests that the ox is being readied for the plough because of its associations with one's enemies in battle.[90] Heroic terminology is not altogether out of place in an ox riddle, since we saw how the ox was described as being of the 'weaponed race' in Riddle 38. However, the terminology used for the human individuals themselves seems more suited to riddles about objects. Instead of the specificity of the *wonfah Wale* or *sweartum hyrde,* we have the more generalised *þegn* and *hlaford*. Cochran takes *hlaford* to be metaphorical for the herdsman, but as the various other interpretations of the riddle's answer suggest, it can be metaphorical for anything, from a bell ringer to the Devil. As observed previously, the use of the terms for slave or fieldworker prevent Riddles 52 and 72 from being read as metaphorical, since their specificity limits the nature of the labour to field work. Typically, when an object enters the hands of humans in the riddles the hierarchy becomes more distinct; the situation is less a case of slave working under a slave – a shared labour – and instead more a case of a slave working for someone of a higher status. The ox, speaking as a leather object at the end of Riddle 12, says:

Saga hwæt ic hatte
þe ic lifgende lond reafige
ond æfter deaþe dryhtum þeowige.
(R. 12, 13b-15a)[91]

The object does a service for humans, whereas the ox labours alongside humans.

[90] Cochran, p. 306.
[91] 'Say what I am called, who when living plunder land and after death serve man.'

Overall, 'ox team' as the answer to Riddle 4 does not fulfill our expectations of the laboring beast, even though we find some similarities between its content and certain ox riddle tropes. In the everyday world, animals and objects are clearly distinct entities, as they are in Christian doctrine,[92] but in the realm of the riddles it is harder to determine whether the solution is a living being or object; the boundary between sentient and non-sentient things is blurred and it is sometimes difficult, albeit not impossible, to find the clues that can help us to make distinctions. This blurring of boundaries stems largely, though not exclusively, from the the removal of living animals from the 'depths of instrumentality'[93] to the more ecologically aware status of subjugated sentient beings.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have attempted to illuminate the way in which the Exeter Book riddles situate their subjects within the Fallen world, a dystopia of suffering and toil, in which the relationship between humans and nature is damaged. Humans can be victims of the natural world, as is depicted in the storm riddles, but they can also be its enemy, exercising their God-given supremacy over the animals and all living things. Subjugated under human beings and afflicted by their labour, the Exeter Book's oxen are depicted as humble, wounded beasts, not powerful and dominant like Aldhelm's

[92] Says Augustine, for example, in his Exposition of Psalm 144: *Deus ordinauit omnia, et fecit omnia: quibusdam dedit sensum, et intellectum, et immortalitatem, sicut angelis; quibusdam dedit sensum et intellectum cum mortalitate, sicut hominibus; quibusdam dedit sensum corporis, nec intellectum, nec immortalitatem dedit, sicut pecoribus; quibusdam uero nec sensum, nec intellectum, nec immortalitatem, sicut herbis, lignis, lapidibus*. 'God disposed all things and made all things. To some he gave feeling and intellect and immortality, as to the angels. To others, as to human beings, he gave feeling and intellect but also a mortal nature. To others again he gave bodily sensation but neither intellect nor immortality; these are the animals. To others he gave neither sensation nor intellect nor immortality, and among these are plants, trees, and stones.' Latin text from Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos CI-CL*, p. 2098. Translation from Rotelle, *Expositions of the Psalms 121-150*, p. 391.

[93] Manes, p. 17.

ox. Riddle 72 turns the formulaic expression of human suffering in the elegies into an expression of nature's suffering, creating a groan of travail that explores the beast's own perspective on its labour and releases the creature from a culturally induced silence. By paying attention to voice, and to the issues surrounding custodianship, as eco-theologians invite us to do, we are able to understand the meaning behind the unambiguous Riddle 72 and lay to rest Wehlau's assertion that 'the riddles are not especially sympathetic towards the creatures they depict'.[94] Furthermore, by approaching the riddles from an eco-theological perspective, by understanding the relationships between humans and nature, we are in a better position to solve those more ambiguous riddles that have so confounded critics.

[94] Wehlau, p. 102.

3.
‘wrætlic weorc smiþa’:
Inverting the Colophon in
Riddle 26

‘…et principium artis ars ipsa, ex qua artificum
diuersorum dein ceps coepit operatio.’[1]

Riddle 26 depicts an animal being killed by the human craftsman – the *feond* ‘enemy’ of its opening line – and its skin being used to make a Bible. Neville calls the treatment of the animal and its hide ‘a successful exercise of human power over the natural world’,[2] and the dominant actions of the human over the passive hide – submerging, cutting, binding and depriving the animal of strength – are certainly suggestive of this.[3] Rather than discussing Riddle 26 in terms of an active-passive postlapsarian relationship between humanity and nature, however, my ecological reading will focus on what I see as the riddle’s more immediate concern with animal origins and materiality. I propose Riddle 26 prioritises the animal and the material element of book

[1] ‘The beginning of a work of art lies in the craft itself, which is the source of the individual skills of a series of craftsmen.’ Latin text from *Sancti Ambrosii opera* (*Hexameron libri sex*), p. 10. Translation from Savage, *Hexameron*, p. 11.

[2] Neville, *Representations*, p. 113.

[3] For a discussion, albeit from a queer theory point of view, of the active-passive relationship between human and parchment in early medieval literature and thought see Susan Schibanoff, ‘Sodomy’s Mark: Alan of Lille, Jean De Meun, and the Medieval Theory of Authorship’, in *Queering the Middle Ages*, ed. by Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger, Medieval Cultures, 27 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 28-57 (pp. 47-50). The relationship, Schibanoff observes, differed from Late Medieval notions which ‘stressed divine rather than human agency in the creation of the Bible’ (p. 49).

production above the human and the spiritual, offering an inversion of the traditional colophon.

Bibles, or gospel books,[4] were often beautiful works of art, created by craftsmen whose contribution was sometimes recorded in a colophon. With its adornments of gold, silver and jewels, Riddle 26 calls its Bible the *wrætlic weorc smiþa* 'wondrous work of craftsmen' (R. 26, 14a), similarly paying tribute to its human makers. However, in order for the beautiful object to be made, an animal must first be skinned and that skin put through various stages of treatment, including wetting, drying and the removal of impurities. So, whilst the riddle acknowledges the work of the craftsman, it also promotes the book's animal origins, playfully placing its focus first on the animal rather than on human achievement.

Reading Riddle 26 through the lens of animal studies, Bruce Holsinger suggests the text provokes sympathy for its subject and argues that the pathos remains throughout the riddle, even when the subject has evolved into a useful book:

> Animal slaughter, the preoccupation of the opening lines, has become merely an afterthought; yet the emotional charge remains as the violent process of rendition that sacrificed a thinking, speaking, experiencing animal for the purposes of the book. The Bible that is the riddle's culminating solution, the 'glorious' book that promises heaven, originates not from the words of the prophets, or from the inspiration of God, but from the flayed hide of the animal who gave its life and endured only as the ink-stained page of the book.[5]

[4] I refer to the answer as 'Bible' throughout, but the riddle could also be solved as 'gospel book', since the adornment shares clear similarities with the Lindisfarne Gospels (to be discussed later in this chapter). Tupper has solved the riddle simply as 'book' (*Riddles*, p. 130) although, as Williamson notes, the final clue that the subject is *halig* 'holy' (28b) means that 'surely the Bible is intended' (Williamson, *Riddles*, p. 212). For reasons that will become clear, I think Wyatt is wrong to say that the answer, whether book or Bible, 'makes little difference' (Wyatt, p. 83).

[5] Bruce Holsinger, 'Of Pigs and Parchment: Medieval Studies and the Coming of the Animal', *PMLA,* 124 (2009), 616-623 (p. 622).

I believe Holsinger is right to say the riddle draws our focus towards the 'thinking, speaking, experiencing animal' and away from the prophets and God, but I suggest the purpose of the riddle's alternative viewpoint is not so much to provoke sympathy for the animal but to refamiliarise humanity with the material world in which he lives and interacts, to immerse the reader in an inverted – that is, a reversed or contrary – spirituality.

Because of its interest in materiality, in the physical or bodily nature of the Bible, Riddle 26 invites a Bakhtinian reading, for the carnivalesque is largely 'a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body' and 'the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract'.[6] Ruth Wehlau has drawn connections between Bakhtinian theory and the riddles, including Riddle 26, calling the collection 'as close as Old English poetry ever comes to the Rabelaisian world of the body and the bawdy'.[7] The connections she draws grow out of similarities she sees between Bakhtinian theory and metaphor, metaphor being, for her, 'the incarnation, the bringing down to earth, of abstract ideas'.[8] Whelau's observations, somewhat marginalised in what is essentially a discussion of Old English metaphor, merit further discussion, especially in relational to the field of eco-centrism, which has been producing ecological readings of Bakhtin's work for over two decades.[9] Using existing knowledge of Anglo-Saxon colophons and book production, as well as Bakhtin's carnivalesque theory, this chapter will explore Riddle 26's resistance to anthropocentrism in terms of the text's denial of human-centrism and its interest in the material, earthly element of the Bible.

[6] Bakhtin, p. 19.
[7] Wehlau, p. 94.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 10.
[9] Primary examples of these readings will be discussed later in the chapter.

The Human Being Behind the Book

To what extent were colophons about the human? Richard Gameson, who has provided a valuable study of early medieval colophons, says 'manuscripts with colophons stand out: though formulaic, such notes give us a heightened sense of the human beings behind the books'.[10] Gameson notes, however, that it is a tendency of modern readers to look for the human, saying 'even the most serious among us remain susceptible to "human interest"' and, furthermore, that 'we tend to look for and admire individuality'.[11] Actually, for a colophon in context, the individual was 'largely irrelevant'.[12] Instead, Gameson argues, 'collectivity and self-effacing humility and obedience were (or should have been) the norms for the monastics who undoubtedly comprised the vast majority of scribes in our period'.[13]

A distinction needs to be made here between a scribe's 'individuality' and the 'human being' behind the book. For, whilst the evidence in colophons suggests scribes were not concerned with communicating a sense of their own individuality, the human labour and dedication that went into their work was something they were keen to purvey to their reader. Scribes saw their work as a labour, and this is expressed in a number of colophons. One scribe relates how he is *sub colle laboris*,[14] whilst another writes, *tres digiti scribunt totum corpusque laborat / Scribere qui nescit nullum putat esse laborem*.[15]

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[10] Richard Gameson, *The Scribe Speaks? Colophons in Early English Manuscripts*, H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2002), p. 30.
[11] *Ibid*., p. 30
[12] *Ibid*., p. 30.
[13] *Ibid*., p. 30.
[14] 'weary under the mountain of labour'. From a colophon at the end of Aldhelm's *De laudibus uiginitate* (manuscript: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 326, p. 137). Text and translation from Gameson, *The Scribe Speaks?*, p. 41.
[15] 'Three fingers write and the whole body labours. He who does not know how to write thinks it no labour.' From Aldhelm's *Epistola ad Heahfredum* (manuscript: London, British Library, Royal 6 A. vi, fols. 5-109r, fol. 109r). Text and translation from Gameson, *The Scribe Speaks?*, p. 41.

Cynewulf's colophon for *Elene* describes spiritual unfettering and unbinding through devotional labour, 'the cultivation not only of [Cynewulf's] craft, but also of his own soul':[16]

> Ic wæs weorcum fah,
> synnum asæled, sorgum gewæled,
> bitrum gebunden, bisgum geþrungen,
> ær me lare onlag þurh leohtne had
> gamelum to georce, gife unscynde
> mægencyning amæt ond on gemynd begeat,
> torht ontynde, tidum gerymde,
> bancofan onband, breostlocan onwand,
> leoðucræf onlaec.
>
> (Elene, 1242b-50a)[17]

Cynewulf's colophons are not typical of most early colophons, being long, poetic reflections on his work and its relationship to his spiritual condition, as opposed to the shorter notes catalogued in Gameson's study,[18] but they are an excellent source for our understanding of the human being behind the book. Cynewulf often worked his name, in runic form, into his text's colophons. As such, Cynewulf is a human being who is impossible to separate from the books into which his work has been written; the runic messages spelling out Cynewulf's name have been described as a way of

[16] Robert DiNapoli, 'Odd Characters: Runes in Old English Poetry', in *Verbal Encounters: Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Studies for Roberta Frank*, ed. by Antonia Harbus and Russell Poole (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 145-62 (p. 158).

[17] 'I was stained by deeds, restrained by sins, afflicted by sorrow, bound by bitterness, oppressed by labour, before the mighty king, as consolation in old age, bestowed on me learning through his radiance, meted out, poured into my mind, the glorious gift, revealed [its] brightness, prolonged my time, unbound my bone-chamber, opened my breast-enclosure, unlocked the art of poetry.'

[18] Gameson makes no mention of Cynewulf's colophons or why they have been omitted from his survey. It is possible they do not entirely conform to Gameson's definition of what a colophon is: 'In its original, broad sense of the finishing touch or *explicit* the colophon was widespread and can be traced back to the beginnings of book production; however our subject here is the subset of such material which may be defined as a formal scribal note which bears – or purports to bear – in some way on the scribe himself and his work' (p. 1).

'perpetuating the poet's name'[19] and as binding the author to the text so that it is impossible for another to remove the author without corrupting the sense of the narrative.[20]

The Lindisfarne Gospel colophon is equally interested in the human being behind the book. The colophon is perhaps the most well-known example of an early medieval colophon and is recorded in Tupper's notes to Riddle 26.[21] The colophon records the human involvement in the making of the gospel book and was written by Aldred, who provided an English gloss for the text. It reads:

> Eadfrið biscop Lindisfearnensis æcclesiæ, he ðis boc aurat æt fruma Gode and Sancte Cuðberhte and allum þæm halgum gimænelice ða ðe in eolonde sint. And Eðilvald Lindisfearneolondinga biscop hit uta giðryde and gibelde sua he uel cuðæ. And Billfrið se oncræ, he gismioðade ða gihrino ða ðe utan on sint, and hit gihrinade mið golde and mið gimmum, æc mið sulfre of'gylded faconleas feh. And Aldred presbyter indignus and misserrimus mið godes fultumæ and Sancte Cuðberhtes hit of gloesade on englisc and hine gihamadi mið ðæm ðriim dælu, Mathews dæl Gode and Sancti Cuðberhtes, Marc dæl ðæm biscop, and Lucas ðæl ðæm hiorode, and æht ora seolfres mið to inlade. And Sancti Johannes dæl fore hine seolfne, and fore his saule, and feouer ora seolfres mið, Gode & Sancti Cuðberhti; þætte he hæbbe ondfong ðerh Godes milsæ on heofnum, seel and sibb on eorðo, forðgeong and giðyngo, wisdom and snyttro, ðerh Sancti Cuðberhtes earnunga.
>
> † Eadfrið, Oeðilwald, Billfrið, Aldred hoc Euangelium Domino and Cuðberhto construxerunt uel ornauerunt.[22]

[19] Dolores Warwick Frese, 'The Art of Cynewulf's Runic Signatures', in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. by Robert E. Bjork (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 323-46 (p. 323).

[20] A concept discussed by Tom Birkett in his paper 'Stitched Up? Cynewulf's Signatures and Poetic Stasis', presented at the Institute of Archaeology's 'Stasis in the Medieval World Conference' (13th April, 2013).

[21] Tupper, *Riddles*, p. 129.

[22] 'Eadfrith, bishop of Lindisfarne church, wrote this book, at the beginning in honour of God and St Cuthbert and, jointly, for all the saints who are on the island. And Æthelwald, Bishop of Lindisfarne island, bound it on the outside and covered it, as he knew fully how to do. And Billfrith, the anchorite, created the treasures that are on the outside and adorned it with gold and gems and also with pure, gilded silver. And Aldred, unworthy and most miserable priest, with the help of God and St Cuthbert, wrote an English gloss of it and was granted a home [in return] for the three parts: Matthew's part for God and Saint Cuthbert, Mark's part for the bishop, and Luke's part for the community – as well as eight silver coins for his entry-fee – and Saint John's part for himself, and for his soul, and four silver coins for God and St. Cuthbert, so that he can have, through God's mercy, [and] through Saint Cuthbert's merit, acceptance into heaven, happiness and peace on earth, success

For Jane Roberts, this colophon strays into a form of egotism; Aldred's dedication, she says, is an 'elaborate conceit' that 'ruminates on his own work'.[23] 'Aldred has 'written himself into the history of this gospel book', Roberts says, and '[his] wish to be seen as playing his part in adding to the book's worth is not to be doubted'.[24] Writing about the purpose of the colophon, Lawrence Nees says, 'if one asks of the composition of the colophon, cui bono? the fundamental answer is clearly Aldred himself'.[25] Whether we see the colophon as straying into egotism – it is worth noting that Aldred's name appears no less than four times throughout the gospel book[26] – it nevertheless tells us about the craftsmanship of the men who made the book and of the nature of their labour in the service of God. The focus of the majority of colophons, we may surmise here, is on the human and the spiritual; the scribes look forward to their separation from the earthly world, asking readers to pray for their souls or offering up their work, much like Aldred and his silver coins, as an *inlade* 'entry-fee' into Heaven.

Such spiritual endeavours were not just about creating beautiful letters, but a whole book that was beautiful inside and out. These objects were as much a cause for admiration as the beautiful script and holy words inside them, and were usually adorned with gems and gold or silver wiring.[27] In his tract on Durham church, Symeon

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and honour, wisdom and intelligence.' There is a cross on the manuscript, followed by, 'Eadfrið, Æthelwald, Billfrið [and] Aldred contructed or adorned this Gospel for God and St. Cuthbert.' Old English from F. E. Harmer, ed. and trans., *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 36. Contractions have been expanded and spellings normalised. Translation is my own.

[23] Jane Roberts, 'Aldred Signs off from Glossing the Lindisfarne Gospels', in *Writing And Texts in Anglo-Saxon England,* ed. by Alexander R. Rumble (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 28-44 (p. 35).

[24] *Ibid*., pp. 35-6.

[25] Lawrence Nees, 'Reading Aldred's Colophon for the Lindisfarne Gospels', *Speculum*, 78 (2003), 333-377 (pp. 351-2). Aldred, Nees argues here, is 'firmly linked with the great book, with St. Cuthbert, and implicitly also, as the fourth and last "author" whose efforts brought the work to completion, with the Evangelist John.'

[26] As noted by Nees, p. 345.

[27] See Richard Gameson, *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration, and Use* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and John Lawrence Sharpe and Kimberly Van Kampen, *The Bible as Book: The Manuscript Tradition* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll, 1998).

praises the beauty of the Lindisfarne Gospel book and the work of the holy men that made it, listing them in the following manner:

> Eadfridi uidelicet uenerande memorie episcopi, qui hunc in honorem beati Cuthberti manu propria scripserat; successoris quoque eiusdem uenerabilis Aethelwoldi, qui uota iubentis manu artifici prosecutus, egregium opus composuerat. Erat enim aurificii arte precipuus. Hi pariter amore dilecti Deo confessoris et pontificis feruentes, suam erga ipsum deuotionem posteris monibus innotescendam hoc opere reliquerunt.[28]

Symeon is clearly impressed by the book, calling it an *egregium opus composuerat* 'outstanding piece of work', and is keen to record, for posterity's sake, such a beautiful item in his tract. The craftsmen are praised for the beauty of the object itself as well as for their devotion to God and St. Cuthbert, a devotion which is demonstrated through their labour.

Riddle 26: An Inverted Colophon

If the colophon tradition recorded what was human and spiritual, Riddle 26 records its antithesis, interrogating the scribal practice it appears to echo and reverting to the animal and material. Riddle 26 is, first and foremost, a product of the riddle tradition, transforming an everyday object into an enigmatic creature and asking the reader to *frige hwæt ic hatte* 'find what I am called' (R. 26, 26b), but it is also an echo of the colophon tradition, sharing obvious similarities with Aldred's colophon for the

[28] 'Bishop Eadfrith of venerable memory, who wrote it with his own hand in honour of St. Cuthbert; his own successor, the venerable Æthelwald, who ordered it to be adorned with gold and gems; and also St. Billfrith the Anchorite, who executed Æthelwald's wishes and commands with a craftsman's hand, producing an outstanding piece of work. For he was distinguished in the goldsmith's art. These men, who were all fervent in their love of the confessor and bishop beloved of God, left in this work something through which all those who come after them may appreciate their devotion towards the saint.' Text and translation from Symeon of Durham, *Libellus de Exordio atque Procursu istius hoc est Dunhelmensis Ecclesie*, ed. and trans. by David Rollason, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 120-1.

Lindisfarne Gospels.[29] Just as Aldred's the colophon is, quite literally, 'an account of the manuscript's history',[30] so, we find, is Riddle 26:

> Mec feonda sum feore besnyþede,
> woruldstrenga binom, wætte siþþan,
> dyfde on wætre, dyde eft þonan,
> sette on sunnan þær ic swiþe beleas
> herum þam þe ic hæfde. Heard mec siþþan
> snað seaxses ecg, sindrum begrunden;
> fingras feoldan, ond mec fugles wyn
> geondsprengde speddropum, spyrede geneahhe
> ofer brunne brerd, beamtelge swealg,
> stremas dæle, stop eft on mec,
> siþade sweartlast. Mec siþþan wrah
> hæleð hleobordum, hyde beþenede,
> gierede mec mid golde; forþon me glisedon
> wrætlic weorc smiþa, wire bifongen.
> (R. 26, 1a-14b)[31]

The riddle details all the processes recorded by Aldred, from the decorating to the writing, but excluding, of course, the gloss. The narrator relates how *fingras feoldan* 'fingers folded' the pages and how a man *wrah* 'covered' it in *hleobordum* 'protective boards', which is what Æthelwald is said to have done; *fugles wyn* 'the bird's joy' write across the *brunne brerd* 'brown surface', just as Eadfrith wrote out the Gospels, and someone else *gierede* 'adorned' the book *mid golde* 'with gold' (7a and 10b-11a) and *wire befongen* 'surrounded [it] with wire' (7b-14b), much as Billfrith adorned the Gospel book.

[29] Tupper, *Riddles*, p. 130.
[30] Roberts, p. 36.
[31] 'Some enemy robbed me of my life, deprived me of my physical strength, wet me then, submerged me in water, took me out afterwards, set me in the sun, where I quickly lost the hair that I had. Hard edge of knife then cut me, impurities [were] ground off. Fingers folded, and the joy of birds repeatedly sprinkled useful drops, travelled over my brown surface, swallowed tree-dye, a share of streams, stepped on me again, travelled [with] dark tracks. A man then covered me in protective boards, stretched hide over me, girded me with gold. Forthwith the beautiful work of smiths adorned me, [who am] encased with wire.'

However, the riddle also contains other important processes not mentioned in Aldred's colophon. The opening lines describe the somewhat unsavoury task of killing the animal, stripping off the skin, wetting and drying it, and then scraping off its impurities. It is widely accepted that scribes and producers of the Bible were familiar with the materials the Bible was made from and the early production process involved, beyond the binding and decorating. These craftsmen, usually monks, often wrote on 'the skins of the monastery's own animals, using quills from its geese'.[32] Aldred does not record the creation of the book's pages from animal skin, or who made them, for reasons we can only guess;[33] but the Bible's material origins were obviously familiar to the writer of Riddle 26, whether from first-hand experience or from a secondary source, and provide a fundamental part of the description.

The killing of the animal and the preparing of its flesh is not the artistic part of the creation of a work of art, yet Riddle 26's author lends as many lines to this aspect of the book-making as the writing and decorating. It is a striking opening, full of graphic imagery, a 'warts and all' depiction of the creation process that revels in the carnal – the flesh before it is made word. Neville argues that a subject from the natural world 'receives full attention from a poet only once is has been…transformed';[34] in contrast to depictions of the natural world in the majority of Old English texts, Riddle 26 gives as much attention to the animal, to the raw material, before it is treated, dried and adorned.

By depicting the Bible in this way, the writer brings us back to the material origins of the product, to the animal itself. This can be described as a play on

[32] Stuart A. P. Murray, *The Library: An Illustrated History* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), p. 121.
[33] Perhaps this was the undesirable part of the production (and thus conveniently omitted), perhaps it was deemed the least praise-worthy or important, or perhaps Aldred did not know who produced the actual pages or they might have been imported from somewhere else.
[34] Neville, *Representations*, p. 30.

conventions; what is not recorded in a colophon (for reasons we can only speculate) becomes the very opening of this riddle. This is not just the history of the craftsmanship, a colophon of human endeavour, but the history of the animal as it evolves from living to non-living thing. Like Aldred, the animal as narrator has written itself in to the Bible's history. And, just as we cannot separate Cynewulf from his work because of his embedded runes, so we cannot separate the animal from the Bible in this riddle; though the animal is altered beyond recognition, both its consciousness and its contribution to the book – its skin – remain.

In Riddle 26, the craftsman is turned into an enemy and is less present than in a traditional colophon. Through the initial stages of the riddle, the various makers are denied individual recognition – knives hack, disembodied fingers fold, and a pen, the *fugles wyn* 'bird's joy', writes across the pages. A human being is first referred to at line 12a, when the transformation is near completion, when it is clear that the hide has become something 'tamed and artificial';[35] the human is the *hæleð* that covers the subject with boards. It is then, two lines later, that the subject acknowledges the *ars ipsa* 'the art itself',[36] calling the book the *wrætlic weorc smiþa* 'wondrous work of smiths' (R. 26, 14a). Here, the riddle's allusion to the praise tradition is made and the craftsmen are commended; yet the riddle undermines or subverts the tradition even as it assumes the form of a colophon. This subversion is achieved through the riddle's association of humanity with the earthly world, its interest in material origins and afterlives, its own carnivalesque ecology.

[35] Neville, *Representations*, p. 30.
[36] Latin text from *Sancti Ambrosii opera*, p. 10. Translation from Savage, *Hexameron*, p. 11.

Carnivalesque Ecology

Despite there being what I believe to be a strong and thought-provoking affinity between Bakhtin's work and the riddles, little criticism has been produced on the subject. To my knowledge, only Ruth Wehlau and D. K. Smith explicitly draw connections between the two fields, but their analyses are more like tasters – that is, they offer hints and possibilities – than full-blown studies. Nevertheless, their allusions to carnivalesque theory offer a useful starting point for thinking about Bakhtin and the riddles.

Both Wehlau and Smith note the similarities between the carnivalesque or grotesque body and the body in the riddles. Smith suggests that the sexual riddles 'call up all the vitality and energy that Bakhtin sees in the carnivalesque',[37] and argues that Riddle 44 in particular 'draws its audience immediately into Bakhtin's world of the carnivalesque…direct[ing] our gaze down, towards the lower half'.[38] Smith, here, is apparently drawing on Bakhtin's observations of the 'downward movement' of Rabelais' work. The downward movement, says Bakhtin

> pervades Rabelais' entire imagery from beginning to end. All these images throw down, debase, swallow, condemn, deny (topographically), kill, bury, send down to the underworld, abuse, curse; and at the same time they all conceive anew, fertilize, sow, rejuvenate, regenerate, praise, and glorify. This general downward thrust, which kills and regenerates, unifies such different phenomena as blows, abuses, the underworld, and the act of devouring.[39]

[37] D. K. Smith, 'Humor in Hiding: Laughter Between the Sheets in the Exeter Book Riddles', in *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. by Jonathan Wilcox (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 79-98 (p. 93).
[38] *Ibid*, p. 89.
[39] Bakhtin, p. 435.

There is more to say than Smith has done about the riddles' associations with Bakhtin; the riddles invite us to look beyond the collection's sexual humour to its rich associations between birth and death and between images that 'debase', 'regenerate', 'conceive anew' but also 'swallow', 'fertilize', and 'rejuvenate'. The making of butter using a churn in Riddle 54, to give one example, is distinctly carnivalesque in the way that it is very much concerned with birth and what is bodily. Using a crude double entendre, the riddle-writer blurs the distinction between the making of butter and the offspring produced by a sexual act. The butter-making process is thus moved to the 'reproductive stratum', to 'the zone in which conception and a new birth take place'.[40]

Wehlau suggests that the riddles, in true carnivalesque fashion, 'concern themselves with birth and death';[41] but she also argues that, unlike other Old English poetry, they 'demonstrate an interest in precisely the parts of the body discussed by Bakhtin'.[42] These parts of the body include the womb and the belly, and these are mentioned many times throughout the riddle collection.[43] Other riddles in the collection contain allusions to impregnation, digesting, and swallowing.[44] Riddle 37, for example,

[40] *Ibid*., p. 21.
[41] Wehlau, p. 115.
[42] *Ibid*., p. 115.
[43] We also find the grotesque imagery of a *womb* 'belly' *þriþum aþrunten* 'swelling greatly' behind it (R. 37, 1b-2a). Its appearance is not dissimilar to the subject of Riddle 87, which is said to have a *wombe…micle / þryþum geþrungne* 'large belly, greatly swollen' (R. 87.1b-2a). Riddle 89 contains a similar theme, with its allusions to a *wombe* 'belly' that could possibly be located *on hindan* 'behind it' and to *swæsendum* 'food' (R. 89, 2b, 5b & 10a) that it gratefully receives – the subject seems to *þoncade* 'thank' its feeder for what it is said to *þygan* 'receive' (R. 89. 9a-b). This subject could also be a bellows, as Tupper suggests (Tupper, *Riddles*, p. 227), although Williamson remains uncertain, noting that 'many riddlic creatures have a *wombe* or "belly"' (*Riddles*, p. 383).
[44] Both the bookworm and the bookcase in Riddles 47 and 49 respectively are said to swallow their 'sustenance', whilst Riddle 23's subject, *spilde geblonden* 'swollen with destruction', is said to *spæte* 'spit' the *ealfelo ættor* 'dire venom' that it *æror geap* 'previously gulped' (R. 23, 8a-9b); in Riddle 49, ingestion is used to describe the act of a servant putting books away, so that the books are said to go *under goman* 'under [its] gum' (R. 49.6a), whilst in Riddle 47 the bookworm *forswealg wera gied sumes* 'swallowed some man's words' (R. 47, 3). In Riddle 17, a creature describes itself as one who has an *innað til* 'good stomach' and a *wombhord wlitig* 'beautiful womb-hoard', and as one who *sped biþ þy mare* 'is the more prosperous' for its *fylle* 'fullness' or 'impregnation' (R. 17.9b, 10a & 4b-5a). Riddle 42 also contains a particularly explicit reference to a pregnancy, describing how the *hwitloc anfeng / wlanc under wædum…fæmne fullo* 'proud, fair-haired maiden

depicts a bellows in action, but rather than presenting an object that literally expels air and draws air back in, we are presented with a strange creature that seems to regurgitate what is inside it – described as both its *felde* 'filling' and it *innað* 'stomach' (R. 37, 4a & 6a) – and then, having expelled this, draws in a reviving breath (R. 37, 7b).

Bakhtin may not seem a likely source of inspiration for an eco-centric reading of the Exeter Book riddles. As a literary critic writing primarily about the human social elements of authors' works, Bakhtin is not typically associated with ecology, as many scholars are quick to acknowledge when exploring the non-human in his work.[45] Yet the same critics tend to agree that *Rabelais and His World* contains, to quote Michael Gardner, '[Bakhtin's] most explicit ruminations on the subject of humanity and nature'.[46] 'Carnival is…about the fundamental unity of people and nature,' says Michael Mayerfield Bell, and this unity, he says, 'find[s] expression in the body imagery characteristic of Rabelais' humor'.[47] Through this body imagery, to quote Bakhtin, 'the confines between bodies and the world are overcome'.[48] By the means of various bodily processes, including eating and drinking, 'the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world'.[49]

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received fullness under her clothes' (42.3b-5a), i.e. she became pregnant, as the result of *plegan / hæmedlaces* 'play at intercourse' (42.2b-3a).

[45] For these types of studies see, for example, Michael Gardner, 'Ecology and Carnival: Traces of a "Green" Social Theory in the Writings of M. M. Bakhtin', *Theory and Society*, 22 (1993), 765-812; Michael J. McDowell, 'The Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 371-392; Michael Mayerfeld Bell, 'Deep Fecology: Mikhail Bakhtin and the Call of Nature', *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 5 (1994), 65-84.

[46] Gardner, p. 766.

[47] Bell, p. 70. Says Bell, 'grotesque realism celebrates the protrusions, orifices, excretions, and fluids of the body. Through them the individual body is continually connected with the world. The canyons, mountains, and welling springs of the body keep it immersed in nature and society' (p. 71).

[48] Bakhtin, p. 317.

[49] *Ibid*., p. 317.

What is also present in Bakhtin's criticism, and what is most applicable to Riddle 26, is an interest in alienation and familiarisation of humans from the natural world, as Gardner explains:

> Through folk laughter and symbolic degradation and renewal, the abstract terror of unknown nature was 'made flesh,' transformed into a 'grotesque monster' to be laughed at and overcome. In other words, the carnivalesque functioned to reverse the estrangement of humanity from nature fostered by the hierarchical medieval order, to re-familiarize human beings with the natural world (including human nature) and thereby bring it "closer to man."[50]

The concept of nature as a 'grotesque monster' to be overcome is provocative when one considers the relationship between nature and monsters in Anglo-Saxon literature. In Anglo-Saxon literature, monsters are depicted as literal, physical beings that inhabit the forbidding fens, seas and forests; monsters were not nature itself, turned grotesquely monstrous through folk laughter and degradation, but a *part* of nature that contributed to humanity's fear of the natural world.[51] What is interesting, however, is the idea that human beings can be refamiliarized with the natural world through symbolic degradation, even if, in the Anglo-Saxon imagination, the 'abstract terror of unknown nature' was not something that could be 'laughed at and overcome'.

Our exploration of the riddles thus far has considered the way in which Christian narratives present and affirm an estrangement of humanity from the natural world after the fall; this estrangement, 'fostered by the hierarchical medieval order', is both reinforced and re-evaluated in the playful realms of the riddle collection. The riddles, in particular Riddle 26, invite a refamiliarization of the human reader with the natural

[50] Gardner, p. 774

[51] See Neville, *Representations*, pp. 70-81. For an in-depth study of the role and representation of monsters in Anglo-Saxon literature see Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995).

world, inviting us to recognise the materials from which a useful object originates. Helen Price is absolutely right in saying that Riddle 26 'acknowledges and embraces materiality'.[52]

Through this process of refamiliarization, Riddle 26 also offers a far more positive depiction of the earthly Bible than Augustine in his *Confessions*. For Augustine, the existence of God's Word in the earthly world is a separation from its intangible essence, its spiritual form, its abstractness. In a passage full of carnal imagery, Augustine relates God's Word as it is received by human beings to the Fall and materiality:

> Aut quis nisi tu, deus noster, fecisti nobis firmamentum auctoritatis super nos in scriptura tua divina? caelum enim plicabitur ut liber et nunc sicut pellis extenditur super nos. sublimioris enim auctoritatis est tua divina scriptura, cum iam obierrunt istam mortem illi mortales per quos eam dispensasti nobis. et tu scis, domine, tu scis, quemadmodum pellibus indueris homines, cum peccato mortales fierent. unde sicut pellem extendisti firmamentum libri tui, concordes utique sermones tuos, quos per mortalium ministerium superposuisti nobis.[53]

Augustine continues:

> Sunt aliae aquae super hoc fermamentum, credo, immortales et a terrena corruptione secretae. laudent nomen tuum, laudent te supercaelestes populi angelorum tuorum, qui non opus habent suspicere firmamentum hoc et legendo cognoscere verbum tuum. vident enim faciem tuam semper, et ibi legunt sine syllabis temporum quid velit aeterna voluntas tua.[54]

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[52] Price, 'Human and Nonhuman', p. 115.

[53] 'And who but you, our God, made for us the firmament, that is, our heavenly shield, the authority of your divine Scriptures? For we are told that *the sky shall be folded up like a scroll* and that, now, it is spread out like a canopy of skins above us. The authority of your divine Scriptures is all the more sublime because the mortal men through whom you gave them to us have now met the death which is man's lot. You know, O Lord, how you clothed men with skins when by sin they became mortal. In the same way you have spread out the heavens like a canopy of skins, and these heavens are your Book, your words in which no note of discord jars, set over us through the ministry of mortal men.' Latin text from Augustine, *Confessiones*, ed. by James J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 190. Translation from Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 321-2.

[54] 'Above this firmament of your Scripture I believe that there are other waters, immortal and kept safe from earthly corruption. There are the peoples of your city, your angels, on high above the firmament. Let them

Herbert R. Kessler sees this passage as a reflection on 'the carnality of all written words, and its removal not just from spiritual reading but an elevating kind of seeing'.[55] This carnality extends not just from the written word but the book itself. As Kessler reflects, 'no medieval scribe would have forgotten that the parchment on which divine revelation is transcribed is literally flesh, the skin of animals'.[56] Thus, when one considers the beauty of the Bible, one might also be reminded, as Augustine was, of its association with the earthly, post-lapsarian world. Riddle 26, with its active-passive human-nature relationship, is a reminder of the post-lapsarian world, but it also depicts a positive relationship between humans and the material Bible, whereby the animal-turned-book can help the reader find happiness, success and better, more loyal, friends.

The carnivalesque offers a 'material reality' which 'connects us to each other and to nature through birth, death, exchange, and renewal'.[57] Through the official order, as indeed through religion, human beings are elevated or set apart from the rest of the created world; through carnival, they are brought down to the level of the animal – to earth. Riddle 26, we might say, is more closely linked to Bakhtin's concept of grotesque realism, the 'essential principle' of which is 'degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity'.[58] This concept resonates

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glorify your name and sing your praises, for they have no need to look upon this firmament of ours or read its texts to know your word. For ever they gaze upon your face and there, without the aid of syllables inscribed in time, they read what your eternal will decrees.'

[55] Herbert L. Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 188.

[56] *Ibid*., pp. 187-8.

[57] Bell, p. 71.

[58] Bakhtin, pp. 19-20.

strongly with Riddle 26 in which something 'high', 'spiritual' and 'abstract' is 'transfer[ed] to the material level'. Riddle 26 depicts something spiritual – God's Word – beginning life as something material, as flesh. 'All…forms of grotesque realism,' says Bakhtin, 'degrade, bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh',[59] but they also regenerate the subject into something new and better, and this is a process that dictates the narrative of Riddle 26.

A Natural Birth: Aldhelm's Riddle 59 'Penna'

Riddle 26's interest in both the post-lapsarian world and materiality, as well as its narrative of degradation, can be explored through a comparison with Aldhelm's Riddle 59 'Penna'. The solutions may ultimately be different – one a book, the other a pen – but just as the Bible in Riddle 26 is a *hæleþum gifre* 'gift to men' (line 28) because it offers moral guidance, so the Bible in Aldhelm's riddle 'leads those who stray not to the heights of heaven':

> Me dudum genuit candens onocrotalus albam,
> Gutture qui patulo sorbet de gurgite limphas.
> Pergo per albentes directo tramite campos
> Candentique viæ vestigial cærula linquo,
> Lucida nigratis fuscans anfractibus arva.
> Nec satis est unum per campos pandere callem,
> Aemita quin potius milleno tramite tendit,
> Quæ non errantes ad cæli culmina vexit.[60]

[59] Ibid., p. 20.

[60] 'I am shining white, born long ago of the gleaming pelican,
Who takes the waters of the sea into his open mouth.
Now I travel a narrow path over white-glowing fields;
I leave cerulean footprints along the shining way,
Obscuring the bright fields with my blackened windings.
It is not enough for me to open one pathway through the fields;
Rather, the road runs its course in a thousand byways
and leads those who stray not to the heights of heaven.'
I use Nancy Porter Stork's translation from *Through a Gloss Darkly: Aldhelm's Riddles in the British Library MS Royal 12.C.xxiii* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), p. 26. The Old English text is taken from Pitman's *Riddles of Aldhelm*. All subsequent references to the text are from this edition.

One of the first things to notice is the absence of human beings from Aldhelm's riddle. There are no craftsmen here and the writing of the words seems more like nature at work than the hand of the scribe. Riddle 26, in contrast, depicts the hide as a passive sufferer beneath the manipulating hands of men, the masters of their materials. What we get in Riddle 26 is a consideration of the relationship between humanity and nature, the active-passive roles of human and material, the transformation of nature into artifice via the hands of *smiþa*.

When we consider the writing process in the Old English riddles in general we find that it is more fraught with violence than in Aldhelm's Riddle 59. Instead of depicting a 'violent process of rendition',[61] Aldhelm's riddle follows the Isidorian tradition of employing ploughing as a metaphor for writing, whereby Aldhelm 'compares the movement of the iron stylus to that of a plough in the field, whose divine crop yield a "holy harvest"';[62] as such, nature gets reduced to mere metaphor. The pens in a number of the latter Exeter Book riddles are at odds with the Latin 'penna', which is described in largely agreeable terms. In Riddle 88, they are *unsceafta* 'monsters' who *innan slitað* 'wound inside' and *wyrdaþ* 'injure' the ink-well in the *wombe* 'stomach' (R. 88, 29a-30a). In Riddle 93, the pen is a plundering enemy who steals treasure:

> Nu min hord warað hiþende feond
> se þe ær wide bær wulfes gehleþan;
> oft me of wombe bewaden fereð,
> steppeð on stið bord
> (R. 93, 27a-30a)[63]

[61] Holsinger, p. 622.
[62] Bitterli, pp. 142-3.
[63] Now a plundering enemy, who previously bore far and wide the wolf's companion, possesses my treasure; often, having emerged from my womb, he travels, steps on stiff board...'

Here, the pen does not come from the 'gleaming pelican', but the dark raven (or war-hawk); as the wolf's companion, it is one of the beasts of battle that ravages those lying dead on the battlefield. Its afterlife is one of continued plundering, stealing the ink from the ink-well and using it to write words on a *stið bord* 'stiff board'. The pot from which it steals has itself been afflicted throughout its life and the riddle includes a grotesque image of the pen wounding the subject's insides; during its creation process *isern innanweardne / brun bennade* 'shining iron wounded [it] internally' (R. 93, 15a-16a) and *heard bite / stiðecg style* 'strong-edged steel bit cruelly' (R. 93, 18b-19a). In Aldhelm's 'Penna' we find imagery of the sea and glowing fields and of 'cerulean footprints' created by the pelican's feather; in Riddle 26 the *fugles wyn* 'joy of birds' *beamtelge swealg* 'swallowed tree-dye', *streamas dæle* 'a deal of streams' (R. 26, 9b). Not only do we encounter the Rabelaisian act of ingestion but the ingestion of the earth; the ink that is swallowed by the quill is both 'tree-dye' and 'streams'.

One final point of contrast is the way in which Aldhelm's feather comes to be a pen. In the riddle, the pen is said to be 'born of the gleaming pelican'; unlike the Bible, it has not arrived at its current form through a violent death at the hands of enemies. Instead, its delivery into the world is depicted as a natural birth, but a birth that is not carnal or grotesquely described, as it is in the Exeter Book sexual riddles. Thus the life it 'lives' as a pen is not a type of afterlife; it is a birth, not a rebirth into the material world. In contrast, the animal in Riddle 26 is killed and reborn as a Bible. The significance of this difference will become clear as we move into the final section of this chapter and consider the relationship between material origins and early medieval concepts of the afterlife. The carnivalesque and grotesque realism embrace 'downwards movement', images which 'throw down, debase, swallow…kill, bury… abuse, curse; and at the same time they all conceive anew, fertilize, sow, rejuvenate,

regenerate, praise, and glorify'.[64] After the subjects' death, abuse and regeneration, Riddle 26 ends with praise for the Bible, with the glorification of the material and its beautiful adornments.

An Afterlife in the Physical World

For Bakhtin, medieval carnival offers 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth', from an 'official culture' which includes 'existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions'.[65] It offers 'a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world'.[66] For the earlier medieval world of Anglo-Saxon England, the 'official' culture included a strict social hierarchy based on the King as the head of the state, followed by ealdormen, thanes and labourers, as well as a stringent Christian value system with its own ecclesiastical hierarchy and religious laws. This officialdom is what we find in the majority of Old English texts and is rigorously upheld throughout the Exeter Book. These texts include both heroic and pious poems, which uphold the 'correct' secular and religious moral codes, as well as wisdom poems like *Maxims I* and *The Order of the World* which relate the 'prevailing truth[s]' as they were perceived at the time of composition. These prevailing truths include the notions that *cyning sceal rice healdan* 'the king must protect his kingdom' (*Mx* II, 1a) and *God sceal mon ærest hergan* 'man must praise God first' (*Mx* I, 4b).

In terms of the riddles, we find manifestations of the official culture in various places throughout the collection; we find it in the pious acknowledgments of God's

[64] Bakhtin, p. 435.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

power,[67] the condemnations of sinful indulgence[68] and the depictions of sombre religious ceremonies.[69] Whilst the official culture is by no means absent from the collection, we also find ways in which the official culture is undermined; as Wehlau says, 'the world of the riddles is the world turned upside down'.[70] For example, the sexual riddles embrace what is typically obscene and transgressive with abandon and good humour, whilst Riddle 50 contains 'the revolutionary idea of a servant restraining the one who grants benefits and joys'.[71] Thus, where a religious text like *The Seafarer* focuses on the spiritual nature of humanity and its separation from the earth after death, a large number of the riddles turn our gaze downwards to what is earthly and bodily, rather than upwards to what is spiritual or heavenly. In their upholding of the official culture, the Old English elegies assert that human beings only temporarily experience the earthly world – *þis deade life, / læne on londe* 'this dead, fleeting life on land' (*Sfr*, 65b-67a); in the riddles, the only rendition of this traditional concept is in Riddle 43. In this riddle, the soul and the body are depicted as a guest and servant who are both *ellorfuse* 'desirous to depart elsewhere' (R. 43, 10a). If the body (*esne* 'servant') serves the soul *arlice* 'properly' (R. 43, 4b-5b),

> hy gesunde æt ham
> findað witode him wiste ond blisse;
> cnosles unrim care, gif se esne
> his hlaforde hyreð yfle,
> (R. 43, 6b-9b)[72]

[67] See, for example, Riddle 40's opening lines, which praise God as *ece* 'eternal', *rice* 'powerful' and the *ryht cyning* 'rightful king' of *eorþan ond heofones* 'heaven and earth' (R. 40. 1-5).
[68] See Riddle 11.
[69] See Riddle 59, which describes how the subject *cwæden…to hæleþum* 'spoke to heroes' (R. 59, 16b-17a) in the hall where men *friþospede bæd god nergende* 'prayed to God the saviour for peace' (R. 59, 3b-4a).
[70] Wehlau, p. 95.
[71] Neville, 'Implement Trope', p. 518. We can also see something of this rebellion against the order in Riddle 23, in the suggestion that the bow *unbunden ænigum hyran* / *nymþe searosæled* 'unbound will obey no one, unless skilfully bound' (R. 23, 15b-16a).
[72] 'Safe at home, they will undoubtedly find nourishment and bliss and countless kin; sorrow, if the servant serves his lord badly'.

The narrator goes on to describe how the process will *sceðeð* 'hurt' when they both *hweorfað* 'depart' from the *bearme* 'bosom' of the earth, their *moddor ond sweostor* 'mother and sister' (R. 43, 11b-14a). Like the death of the creatures in the riddles discussed thus far, the passing from one life to the next will be painful; but for the soul and body, they will have spiritual rewards and eternal happiness.

For animals, their lives have both beginning and end. In his study of Anglo-Saxon concepts of the soul and the mind, M. R. Godden provides a useful pair of passages from the Anglo-Saxon *Boethius* and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* that distinguish the life of a human being from the life of an animal and other living things.[73] I quote them both here because of their focus on beginnings and endings, on what a creature *becomes* after death. In *Boethius* (42.13-19), it is asked:

> Wast þu þæt þreo ðing on þis middangearde? An is hwilendlic, ðæt hæfð ægðer ge fruman ge ende; and nat ðeah nanwuht þæs ðe hwilendlic is, nauðer ne his fruman ne his ende. Oðer þing is ece, þæt hæfð fruman and næfð nænne ende; and wat hwonne hit onginð, and wat þæt hit næfre ne geendað; þæt sint englas and monna saula. Þridde þing is ece buton ende and buton anginne; þæt is God.[74]

[73] M. R. Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 271-298 (pp. 279-280). Godden refers to the author as Alfred, but Alfred's authorship of the poem has been disputed in recent years. See Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?', *Medium Ævum*, 76 (2007), 1-23, and Janet Bately, 'Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything? The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited', *Medium Ævum*, 78 (2009), 189-215.

[74] 'Do you know the three things on this earth? One is temporary; it has both beginning and end, and nothing that is temporary knows either its beginning or its end. The other thing is eternal; it has beginning and no end, and it knows when it begins and knows that it does not end; they are the angels and men's souls. The third thing is eternal, without end and without beginning; that is God.' This passage has been diversely translated, but I follow Godden's suggestion that it is the temporary being that does not know of its beginning or its end, rather than W. J. Sedgefield's suggestion that the narrator does not know of anything temporary. See Godden, 'The Alfredian Boethius Project', *Old English Newsletter*, 37 (2003), 26-34 (pp. 28-30).

Here, observes Godden, the author 'recasts Boethius's clearest reference to animals having souls'.[75] Ælfric, drawing on *Boethius*, says in *The Lives of Saints* (1, *Nativitas Domini*, 25-31):

> Đreo þing synd on middanearde, an is hwilwendlic, þe hæfð ægðer ge ordfruman ge ende, þæt synd nytenu and ealle sawul-lease þing þe ongunnan þa þa hi god gesceop, and æft geændiað and to nahte gewurðaþ. Oðer þing is ece, swa þæt hit hæfð ordfruman and næfð nænne ende, þæt synd ænglas and manna saula, þe ongunnen ða þa hi god gesceop, ac hi ne geendiað næfre. Đridde þing is ece, swa þæt hit næfð naðor ne ordfrumman ne ende, þæt is se ana ælmihtiga god.[76]

This passage is clearly similar to that in *Boethius*, but omits the concept that non-human beings have no knowledge of their beginning and end. Both passages echo a similar notion asserted in the Anglo-Saxon version of St. Basil's *Hexameron*, namely, that animals are born, just like humans, but do not have souls:

> Ælce geare byð orf accened. and mennisce men to mannum acennede. ða ðe gewyrcð swa swa he geworhte ða ærran. and he ne scypð nane sawle buton ðam cildum anum. And ealle nytenu nabbað nane sawle.[77]

The *nytenu* 'ignorant ones' here refer to animals, who do not have reason or wisdom. Both passages echo the statement made in *Maxims I* that *God us ece biþ* 'God is eternal to us' (*Mx* I, 8b); in this Exeter Book wisdom text, the narrator says of God, *ne*

[75] For a comparison, see Godden, 'Anglo-Saxons on the Mind', p. 280, footnote no. 27.

[76] 'There are three things on earth. One is temporary, which has both beginning and end; they are ignorant and all soul-less things that God made in the beginning, and consequently [they] end and turn to nothing. The other thing is eternal, so that it has beginning and no end; they are the souls of angels and men, which God made in the beginning, but they do not end. The third thing is eternal so that it doesn't have a beginning or end, and that is the one almighty God.'

[77] 'Each year cattle are born and people are born to human beings, who [God] makes just as he the former made. And he makes no soul but for the children alone, and all the ignorant ones do not have a soul.'

wendað hine wyrda, ne hine wiht drece þe / adl ne yldo 'events do not change Him, nor do old age or illness afflict Him a whit'; *He is gen swa he wæs* 'He is still as He was', the author states (*Mx* I, 9-11).

The fleeting and the eternal, beginnings and ends – these notions offer us a useful route into understanding the material afterlife of the animal-turned-Bible. The point I wish to make is not that Riddle 26 gives evidence in support or against the notion that animals *nabbað nane sawle*; it is that it depicts the opposite of a spiritual afterlife, a material rebirth, offering a playful reflection on the notion that an animal *nahte gewurðaþ* 'become[s] nothing'. The Exeter Book riddles make various references to what begins and ends, from the *ece* 'eternal' Creator (R. 40, 1a) to the water whose *or ond ende* 'beginning and end' the *fæder…bewat* 'the Father saw' (R. 84, 9b-10a). Yet most riddles in the collection do not make a clear distinction between their subjects' beginning and end; in the playful realm of the Exeter Book riddles a dead thing – whether animal or plant – can be reshaped or reborn as something else. The riddles' creatures, reborn as objects, must serve humans, just as the body serves the spirit whilst it lives. Reborn, they might take on a new life as clothing, a weapon, a book or any other object useful to human beings. *Saga hwæt ic hatte* 'Say what I am called,' says the subject of Riddle 12, *þe ic lifgende lond reafige / ond æfter deaþe dryhtum þeowige* 'I who, living, ravage the land, and after death serve men' (R. 12, 13b-15b). In these riddles, the wholeness of a living thing, its body, is transformed into something new and the subject takes on a different identity and a new role. This transformation is what happens in Riddle 26.

To further illuminate the role of the afterlife in the ecological underpinnings of the riddles, let us turn to Cynewulf's colophon at the end of *The Fates of the Apostles.*

Here, Cynewulf, having asked the reader to pray to the *halgan heap* 'holy company' for his *friðes ond fultomes* 'peace and rescue', says

> ...huru ic freoma beþearf
> liðra on lade, þonne ic sceal langne ham,
> eardwic uncuð, ana gesecean,
> lætan me on laste lic eorðan dæl,
> wælreaf, wunigean weormum to hroðre.
> (*FoA*, 91b-95b)[78]

The use of the term *wælreaf* 'spoils of slaughter' is particularly striking in this passage. This is a term that we might associate more with a body slain in battle, not with the body of a man grown old in years. Yet more arresting is the fact that the animal subject of Riddle 26 might also be considered the 'spoils of slaughter'. It was killed by an enemy, deprived of its physical strength and, in an interesting inversion, hacked and scraped by a human, just as a wolf or raven might tear into a corpse.[79] We may also consider the possibility that the animal's body, like Cynewulf's, may one day become a 'joy to worms'. This fate is one that we are made familiar with in the bookworm riddle:

> Moðde word fræt– Me þæt þuhte
> wrætlicu wyrd þa ic þæt wundor gefrægn,
> þæt se wyrm forswealg wera gied sumes,
> þeof in þystro, þrymfæstne cwide
> ond þæs strangan staþol.
> (R. 47, 1a-5a)[80]

[78] 'Truly I need gentle friends on my journey, when I shall alone seek the long-lasting home, the unknown dwelling-place, leave behind me the body, the portion of the earth, the spoils of slaughter, to remain to be a joy to worms.'

[79] As, for example, in the description of the beasts of battle in *The Battle of Brunanburh*:

> Letan him behindan hræ bryttian
> saluwigpadan, þone sweartan hræfn,
> hyrnednebban, ond þane hasewanpadan
> earn æftan hwit, æses brucan,
> grædigne guðhafoc ond þæt græge deor,
> wulf on wealde.

'[The warriors] left behind them the dark-plummaged, horny-beaked, black raven and the dusky-coated, white-tailed eagle, to share out the corpses, to enjoy the carrion, the greedy war-hawk and the grey beast, the wolf of the forest.' (*Brn*, 60a-65a).

[80] 'A moth ate words. It seemed a wondrous event to me when I heard that miracle, that the worm, a thief in the darkness, devoured some man's poem, the glorious discourse and its strong foundation.'

Just as Cynewulf's body will be left behind on the earth to decay, so also will the slaughtered animal's in the form of a book.

I suggest that the decision to open Riddle 26 with the imagery of the spoils of slaughter, normally associated with the human body, is to explore the possibility of negated spirituality for non-human subjects and their renewal in the earthly realm. In a contrast to the traditional concept of the spirit leaving the earthly realms for the heavenly city, the slaughtered animal experiences a re-immersion into the material world. There, it must eternally serve humanity as a Bible, offering its reader various benefits on earth. Its new physical form, with its beautiful adornments, celebrates its new role in the hands of humans. Riddle 67, another text about the Bible, reveals the nature of the Bible's eternal life on earth. Its subject, a *wrætlic wiht* 'wondrous' creature and the *leoda lareow* 'people's teacher' (R. 67, 2a & 10a), is depicted as living an afterlife:

> Forþon nu longe m[.]g
> [.....] ealdre ece lifgan
> missenlice, þenden menn bugað
> eorþan sceatas.
> (R. 67, 10b-13a)[81]

There is a certain irony about the subject's death and rebirth into the physical world; for the Bible's main purpose is to prepare human souls for their journey to heaven, whilst its own afterlife must be one of materiality as opposed to spirituality. The book that guides humans to heaven, or, we might consider, the animal slaughtered to make it, will not experience heaven itself but an eternal life on earth.

[81] 'So, for a long time now... [it] lives eternal life in diverse ways, whilst men inhabit earth's bosom'.

Carnival is about materialisation in the physical world and the giving of a 'second life', whether that be to an object or a person. The relationship between this 'second life' and the afterlife is discussed by Lindley, who says:

> We are dead but in carnival we may be transformed and live. In the midst of death, like Augustine before his conversion, we are on the verge of life. To call carnival the people's "second life" is, of course, to offer it as an alternative afterlife. Carnival is true religiosity for Bakhtin because it is inverted religiosity, promising spiritual release through denial of the spirit and immersion in the material.[82]

This concept may seem to be far removed from the riddles, focused as it is on the spiritual freedom the carnival gives humans, as opposed to the afterlife of the non-human; but the notion of a rejection of spirituality in favour of an 'immersion in the material' offers us a way of thinking about the riddles. I suggest that, whilst the riddles are not unequivocally 'carnivalesque', they represent a similar method of interrogating spiritual boundaries and exploring the nature of materiality. The riddles, through their carnival mood and dystopian setting, have a particular license to explore these unchartered areas of the Anglo-Saxon imagination. Through their air of playfulness, the riddles can explore the imaginative possibilities of a material afterlife, rather than the serious nature of the spiritual afterlife, as found in the Exeter Book's religious texts. Their appearance alongside pious texts like *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, whose focus is on the soul's departure from the earthly realm to the heavenly, effectively sharpens the contrast between materiality and spirituality.

When we reflect on the way in which the animal is killed and remade as a Bible in Riddle 26, we can consider this, too, to be more of a reincarnation than a rebirth. The subject retains its skin, entering another fleshly form and the imagery used is

[82] Arthur Lindley, *Hyperion & Hobbyhorse: Studies in Carnivalesque Subversion* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), p. 20.

particularly carnal; the animal is killed and its hide scrubbed down and treated, before ink is written across the 'living' flesh – 'living' in the sense that the consciousness of the animal remains throughout the text. 'Bakhtin reverses the traditional idea of the wonder of resurrection',[83] and this is something the riddles achieve in their darkly playful mixture of death, rebirth, the earthly and the carnal. It is interesting to note how *The Phoenix*, a poem all about the 'wonder of resurrection', describes, with almost a morbid fascination, the physics of the bird's rebirth; he says how *feorh edniwe* 'life is renewed' when the *yslan* 'ash' is *lucan togædre* 'massed together', *geclungne to cleowenne* 'compacted into a ball', and the *banfæt gebrocen* 'broken bone-vessel' is *acolad* 'cooled' (*Phx*, 223b-28b). Like the riddles, transformation is depicted as a wonder, but also as wonderfully carnal.

As a closing observation, it is useful to compare the rebirth of the animal as a Bible with the visitation of the human spirit to its body in The Exeter Book's *Soul and Body II*. The poem details the decomposition of the sinful body; if the phoenix is indeed, as Calder suggests, a symbol of mankind 'fallen and then redeemed',[84] *Soul and Body II* depicts the time before the reforming of the body, the *banfæt gebrocen* 'broken bone-vessel', during the resurrection. In the poem, the soul warns its *arleasan eardungstowe* 'dishonorable dwelling-place' (*S & B II*, 66a-b) that the treasures it valued in life will not save either of them in death:

> Ne magon þe nu heonan adon hyrste þa readan,
> ne gold ne sylfor ne þinra goda nan,
> ac her sculon abidan ban bireafod,
> besliten seonwum
>
> (*S & B II*, 54a-57a)[85]

[83] Emerson, pp. 156-7.
[84] Calder, p. 168.
[85] 'Now henceforth red jewels cannot set you free, nor gold nor silver, none of your possessions, but here you must abide, [your] bones plundered, torn from their sinews'

Here, it is asserted that neither jewels, gold nor silver will help the decaying, sinful body. A similar assertion is made by Cynewulf at the end of *The Fate of the Apostles* when he says that the *læne lices frætewa* 'body's borrowed ornaments' (*FoA*, 102a) will *gedreosan* 'come to ruin' (*FoA*, 100b). In marked contrast, Riddle 26 suggests that jewels and other adornments are part of the animal's positive reincarnation back into the material world. Decorated with *golde* 'gold', covered with *wire* 'filigree', the creature's rich possessions give it new value and meaning:

> Nu þa gereno ond se reada telg
> ond þa wuldorgesteald wide mære
> dryhtfolca helm– nales dol wite.
> (R. 26, 15a-17b)[86]

Where the narrator of *Soul and Body II* must *wemman mid wordum* 'defile [the body] with words' (*S & B II*, 59a), because of the body's interest in worldy riches, the narrator of Riddle 26 can use its wordly riches to *mære* 'proclaim' the glory of God, much like the *halege menn* 'holy men' who *gode lifgendum lofsong doð* 'perform a song of praise to the living God' (*S & B II*, 63b-64b). It is also interesting to note that the soul believes the body would have been better if it had been made an ignorant creature than to be given all the world's wealth:

> Ne sindon þine geahþe wiht,
> þa þu her on moldan monnan eawdest.
> Forþon þe wære selle wiþe micle
> þonne þe wæran ealle eorþan spede,
> (butan þu hy gedæle dryhtne sylfum),
> þær þu wurde æt frumsceafte fugel oþþe fisc on sæ,

[86] 'Now the ornaments and the red dye and the glorious possessions proclaim the people's protector not the afflictions of hell.'

oððe eorþan neat ætes tiolode,
feldgongende feoh butan snyttro
(*S & B II*, 69b-76b)[87]

Because of their ignorance, earth's beasts have no interest in jewels or other riches and thus they are not susceptible to sinful materialism and its consequences; it is only when they are taken into human hands and transformed that they become aware of the worth of beautiful adornments, of their own *wuldorgesteald* 'glorious possessions' (R. 26, 16a). But their worth is of a different quality, used as a testament to God's glory rather than as a show of wealth to other humans. The narrator's reflection allows us to draw connections and observe contrasts between the fate of a sinful human body and the fate of an animal *butan snyttro* 'without intelligence' (*S & B II*, 76b); an animal, though suffering a violent, humiliating death, can be reborn and employed, but a sinful body must *abidan* 'remain' (*S & B II*, 56a) as useless plunder for worms.

Conclusions

To conclude, my reading of Riddle 26 has shown how the writer has taken a human-centric idea – the creation of a book, with all its spiritual connotations of labour and service – and turned it into something that is very much focused on the animal and the material. Bitterli's reading of Riddle 26 as a metaphor for a Christian martyr is attractive,[88] but my more literal approach allows us to consider how the riddle-writers conceptualised the non-human aspect of the Bible-making process, an aspect that merits our attention. I have shown that whilst the riddle acknowledges the work of the

[87] 'Your luxuries that you showed to men here on earth are nothing. Therefore it would have been very much better for you that at your beginning you were made a bird or a fish of the sea, or a beast of the earth that labored for food, a field-traversing ox without intelligence, than you were given all of earth's wealth (except if you had given it to the Lord yourself).'
[88] Bitterli, p. 178.

craftsman, it also promotes the book's animal origins and, in doing so, diverts the anthropocentric focus on human involvement in the Bible-making process. Riddle 26, like other riddles in the collection, invites readers to refamiliarize themselves with the natural world by alluding to the materials that originate from it.

Instead of reading the riddle through the lens of animal studies, I have used Bakhtin's carnivalesque theory, with its associations of humanity with earth, as a tool with which to think about the riddle's interest in materiality. Bakhtin's concept of something 'high', 'spiritual' and 'abstract' being 'transfer[ed] to the material level', I have shown, resonates strongly with the narrative of Riddle 26, as a typically spiritual object begins its life as something distinctly material. By developing the idea of animal materiality, I have been able to show how concepts of death and new life in the more traditional Exeter Book texts (e.g. the elegies) are explored and inverted in the riddle collection. As playful texts, the riddles challenge common ways of thinking about spirituality and the afterlife; what is spiritual in the elegies and other texts in the Exeter Book is material in the riddles.

4.
‘Deope gedolgod’:
Wounding and Shaping
in Exeter Book Riddles 53 and 73

Exeter Book Riddles 53 and 73 depict flourishing trees being cut down and shaped by ‘enemies’. Most of the scholarly attention given to these two riddles has been invested in finding their solutions – a task that has proved particularly difficult for the ambiguous Riddle 53. This focus means that the pathos of the riddles’ narratives, which involve the trees being wounded and changed from their natural states, tends to be overlooked. I wish to draw attention to these narratives, emphasising their importance for what they reveal about early medieval attitudes towards the natural world and humanity’s use of its materials. These attitudes resonate with the concerns of modern eco-theologians regarding the use of the created world by human beings and the intrinsic worth of nature.[1] The tree riddles, in particular Riddle 53, not only depict their subjects within a post-lapsarian dystopia but draw connections between the integrity of the tree in its natural environment and its role as an object in the hands of humans.[2]

[1] The Earth Bible Team, ‘Six Ecojustice Principles’, p. 24. See Principle 1.

[2] Leena Vikka offers an in-depth study of the meaning of intrinsic value and intrinsic worth in *The Intrinsic Value of Nature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997). She broadly defines intrinsic value as something which has ‘value for its own sake’ and distinguishes it from ‘instrumental value’ (pp. 14-15). See also *Recent Work on Intrinsic Value*, ed. by Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen and Michael J. Zimmerman (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), and Michael J. Zimmerman, *The Nature of Intrinsic Value* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001). This latter book is, as the author himself admits, ‘pretty dense’ (p. 5), and contains investigations than are far deeper than this

The emphasis on the trees' early life and initial wholeness, I suggest, produces a conflict in the riddles between the trees' natural integrity and their potential value as objects.

The riddles' emphasis on a natural object's wholeness is strikingly at odds with the importance placed on the 'end product' in early Christian thought. A metaphor from Augustine, for example, imagining God's love of sinners to be like the carpenter's love for the potentiality of his material, suggests trees are valued for their future use as objects, just as humans must be considered for their spiritual potential.[3] For early theologians, the world had no value unless it could be shaped and adorned, as Neville explains:

> the world is *idel ond unnyt* 'empty and useless' (106a) until divided, established and eventually adorned and bound; that is, the organised, tamed and artificial (in the sense of 'artful', not the modern pejorative sense) have value, while that natural has at best an unrealised potential for value, at worst a hostile uselessness. An originally *idel ond unnyt* natural world can become valuable only by divine or human effort; it is meaningless, even horrible, without reference to or contact with humanity. Thus the land or a horse is valuable because it can be cultivated or adorned, and receives full attention from a poet only once is has been so transformed…[4]

Interestingly, the riddle-solver's quest for a solution mirrors a similar anticipation for, or preoccupation with, the end product, not the natural source of the material. Yet the quest for a solution is challenged in Riddle 53 through the text's depiction of the tree's early life and its refusal to allow the solver to find a satisfying answer. This chapter explores the tree riddles both in terms of their post-lapsarian setting and their interest

present study requires, but it does offer some useful ways of thinking about intrinsic value (see especially Chapter 3).

[3] A full citation and discussion of this metaphor can be found later in this chapter.

[4] Neville, *Representations*, p. 30. Neville refers here to *Genesis A*, lines 92-168.

in organic beginnings and moves into a consideration of fallen humanity's affiliation with the natural world through its spiritual status as 'unshaped' material.

Wounded Trees

Riddles 53 and 73 depict a living thing growing up in its natural environment before being enslaved by enemies and put to use[5] – a trope that we find throughout the riddle collection. Both depict servitude and suffering and, though they ultimately help humans to accomplish deeds, the writers express concern over how they came to serve their masters. Like its preceding ox riddle, Riddle 73 begins with a living thing being nurtured in its natural environment before being cut down and displaced by human beings. For many years, the tree has flourished, until enemies come to turn it into a weapon, as the tree itself relates:

> Ic on wonge aweox, wunode þær mec feddon
> hruse ond heofonwolcn, oþþæt me onhwyrfdon,
> gearum frodne, þa me grome wurdon,
> of þære gecynde þe ic ær cwic beheold,
> onwendan mine wisan, wegedon mec of earde,
> gedydon þæt ic sceolde wiþ gesceape minum
> on bonan willan bugan hwilum.[6]
> (R. 73, 1a-7b)

The tree suffers at the hands of men and enters a form of enslavement. The writer invites the reader to feel compassion for the subject's plight, for the loss of its happy existence at the hands of humans. There have been a variety of suggestions as to

[5] For a brief discussion of the enslaved tree see Michael Bintley, '*Brungen of Bearwe*: Ploughing Common Furrows in Exeter Book Riddle 21, *The Dream of the Rood*, and the *Æcerbot Charm*', in *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 144-57 (pp. 146-7 & 150). Bintley defines slavery in this context as being a prisoner 'made to perform some sort of arduous or unpleasant task' (p. 150).

[6] 'I grew in a field, dwelt where earth and heaven-cloud fed me, until those who were grim against me turned me, old in years, out of the quality that I previously held when living, changed my condition, bore me out of my native land, made it so that at times I must, against my nature, bend to a killer's will.'

what the tree is made into, including a lance, spear and bow and arrow,[7] but I take 'bow' as the most likely answer. This is primarily because the act of bending in obeisance to a master mimics the bending of a bow as the string is drawn back, but also because it is comparable to Riddle 23 whose answer, also 'bow', is more certain. In Riddle 23, the weapon is described as both *on gewin sceapen* 'shaped in affliction' and through *wite gescop* 'torture created' (Riddle 23, 2b and 6b), whilst in Riddle 73 men are *grome* 'grim' against the tree (R. 73, 3b). In Riddle 73 the object must bend *wiþ gesceape* 'against [its] nature' (R. 73, 6b), alluding to the drawing of the bow, whilst in Riddle 23 the object will not obey its master if he is *unbunden* 'unbound'; it will not *ænigum hyran* 'serve anyone' unless *searosæled* 'cunningly tied' (R. 23, 15a-16a). In both instances, the writer plays with the concept of servitude through the shape or handling of the bow.

The shaping of wood in Riddle 53 is equally as harrowing for subject and reader as that in Riddle 73. This riddle also depicts a tree being felled in the woods and then being turned into something for human use:

> Ic seah on bearwe beam hlifian,
> tanum torhtne; þæt treow wæs on wynne,
> wudu weaxende. Wæter hine ond eorþe
> feddan fægre oþþæt he frod dagum
> on oþrum wearð aglachade
> deope gedolgod, dumb in bendum,
> wriþen ofer wunda, wonnum hyrstum
> foran gefrætwed.
>
> (R. 53, 1a-8a)[8]

[7] For 'spear or lance' see Tupper (*Riddles*, p. 211) and Wyatt (p. 114). For 'bow' see Doane (p. 256) and for 'bow and incendiary arrow' see Hans Pinsker and Waltraud Ziegler, *Die altenglischen Rätsel des Exeterbuchs*: *Text mit deutscher Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Anglistische Forschungen, 183 (Heidelburg: C. Winter, 1985), p. 304.

[8] 'I saw a tree rise high in a wood, bright in its branches. The tree was in joy, a flourishing wood. Water and earth fed it abundantly, until old in days it fell in another torment, deeply wounded, dumb in fetters, wounds fastened over, adorned at the front with dark ornaments.'

What then follows is a depiction of its labour: it must *hildegieste oþrum rymeð* 'clear a path for another enemy' with his *heafdes* 'head' (8b-10a). Like the labouring ox in Riddle 72, the tree is *dumb in bendum*; in its service, it is silent. The solution to this riddle is harder to determine than Riddle 73, although most critics take 'battering ram' as the answer.[9] F. H. Whitman prefers 'the Cross' as a solution,[10] since, he says, 'all the motifs are to be found associated with this subject in the writings of the period'.[11] He further argues that 'structurally the riddle divides into two halves, the Cross in preparation and its battlework, corresponding to the two principle movements of the crucifixion, Christ's suffering and his triumph'.[12] In contrast, Jonathan Wilcox puts forward 'gallows', which he believes 'better accounts for all the details of the riddle'.[13] He argues that the gallows 'clears a way for the criminal, a journey downwards to death, the grave, and hell', thus explaining the motion of the object.[14] As Wilcox goes on to demonstrate, the interpretation also proves to be a striking comparison to *Rood* in which the tree, though similarly violated, provides a path to heaven. For now, the final solution is not the most important aspect of the riddle – indeed, either riddle – rather, the depiction of the cutting down and shaping of the tree. As I shall argue later, Riddle 53 refuses to offer one simple answer, asking us, the readers, to play the carpenter and choose what we turn the object into – a cross or gallows, or other objects of our imaginations.

[9] This is despite there being no material evidence of their use in Anglo-Saxon England, although Williamson has argued that 'knowledge of the Roman ram was passed down through literary...and iconographic sources' (*Riddles*, p. 297).
[10] F. H. Whitman, 'Significant Motifs in Riddle 53', *Medium Ævum*, 46 (1977), 1-11.
[11] *Ibid*., p. 2. These motifs include primarily, though not exclusively, the adorned tree and the 'clearing of a way' into heaven – 'the opening of the way for the righteous into heaven' (p. 6).
[12] *Ibid*., p. 2.
[13] Jonathan Wilcox, 'New Solutions to Old English Riddles: Riddles 17 and 53', *Philological Quarterly*, 69 (1990), 393-408 (p. 398).
[14] *Ibid*., p. 400.

The Dream of the Rood and *The Phoenix*

The Old English poems *The Phoenix* and *The Dream of the Rood* provide an important point of comparison and contrast for the tree riddles and a useful starting point for thinking about the riddles' themes of shaping and fallenness.[15] Both poems contain flourishing trees, but they are trees that have very different fates: the tree in *The Phoenix* grows within the borders of Paradise and is protected from death and suffering, whilst the tree in *Rood* grows in the post-lapsarian world of corruption and decay and, unprotected, is cruelly cut down and injured by men (the 'enemy'). In the least discussed of the two poems, *The Phoenix*, the primary subject is the ancient bird and its resurrection from the ashes, but the poet devotes much attention to the description of the realm of Paradise and the tree in which the phoenix dwells. As discussed in Chapter 1, Paradise is a pre-lapsarian ideal, protected from the suffering and decay of the post-lapsarian world. Its separation from the familiar world is established in the poem's opening lines:

> Hæbbe ic gefrugnen þætte is feor heonan
> eastdælum on æþelast londa,
> firum gefræge. Nis se foldan sceat
> ofer middangeard mongum gefere
> folcagendra, ac he afyrred is
> þurh meotudes meaht manfremmendum.
> (*Phx*, 1a-6b)[16]

Its separation from the everyday world is suggested by the fact that it is a place that humans cannot reach. In this place

[15] This is not the first time a tree riddle has been compared to *The Dream of the Rood*. See Bintely, 'Ploughing Common Furrows', for a comparison of Riddle 21 and *Rood*.

[16] 'I have heard that there is far from here, in the East, the pleasantest of lands, famous to men. The region of land is not accessible to many of the ruling nations throughout this middle-earth, but it is removed from evil-doers by the power of the Lord.'

Ne mæg þær ren ne snaw,
ne forstes fnæst, ne fyres blæst,
ne hægles hryre, ne hrimes dryre,
ne sunnan hætu, ne sincaldu,
ne wearm weder, ne winterscur
wihte gewyrdan, ac se wong seomað
eadig ond onsund.

(*Phx*, 14b-20a)[17]

Here there is also to be found no *laðgeniðla* 'persecutors', *ne wop ne wracu* 'no weeping or cruelty', *weatacen nan* 'no sign of grief' and no *enga deað* 'no painful death' (*Phx*, 50a-52b).[18] Being *afyrred* 'removed' from *manfremmendum* 'sinners' by *meotudes meaht* 'the Lord's might' (*Phx*, 5b-6b), the woods flourish, as the author goes on to describe:

Smylte is se sigewong; sunbearo lixeð,
wuduholt wynlic. Wæstmas ne dreosað,
beorhte blede, ac þa beamas a
grene stondað, swa him god bibead.
Wintres ond sumeres wudu bið gelice
bledum gehongen; næfre brosniað
leaf under lyfte, ne him lig sceþeð
æfre to ealdre, ærþon edwenden
worulde geweorðe.

(*Phx*, 33a-41a)[19]

This is an enclosed place not affected by the Fall; it is a realm of 'benign symbiosis'[20] between all aspects of nature, sheltered from the corruption of the world beyond. Here,

[17] 'No rain nor snow, nor the breath of frost, nor the blast of fire, nor the destruction of hail, nor the fall of rime, nor the sun's heat, nor perpetual cold, nor warm weather, nor winter shower, can change its state a whit, but the plain remains perfect and unspoilt.'

[18] The Old English citation is from George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, eds, *The Exeter Book*, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 3 (New York: Columbia University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 94-113.

[19] 'The glorious plain is tranquil; the sunny grove glimmers, a joyful wood. Fruits do not perish, nor bright foliage, but the trees stand always in youth/green, as God commanded them. Winter and summer, the wood is equally hung with leaves; a leaf never withers under the sky, nor does fire injure them, always and forevermore, before the change happens to the world.'

[20] Ovitt, p. 489.

Nature has not been condemned to suffer for humanity's sins but can live eternally, without suffering. Exploitative humanity lives on the outside, where the Exeter Book riddles situate themselves. Calder is right to say that aspects of this poem show 'a profound understanding of Adam's fall'.[21]

In its depiction of a flourishing, incorrupt realm, the text also offers us a model of the thriving tree. This tree is described as being given to the phoenix by God and as excelling in its growth and bloom because there is no sin in Paradise:

> Hafað þam treowe forgiefen tirmeahtig cyning,
> meotud moncynnes, mine gefræge,
> þæt se ana is ealra beama
> on eorðwege uplædendra
> beorhtast geblowen; ne mæg him bitres wiht
> scyldum sceððan, ac gescylded a
> wunað ungewyrded, þenden woruld stondeð.
> (*Phx,* 175a-181b)[22]

What is particularly notable here is the description of the tree's protection from violence and corruption. The tree cannot be damaged or altered from its original state and this, the poet insinuates, is something to be celebrated and admired. Of particular interest is the use of the word *ungewyrded* 'uninjured', which gives the tree an anthropomorphic quality. The poet is vague about the *scyldum* 'crimes' that can be done to this tree, and about the *bitres* 'bitter' forces that carry them out, but the most likely implication is that they are wicked men who would cut it down, thus causing it 'injury'. To glorify a protected tree in this way suggests that any alterations of a tree's original state by sinful beings (the *manfremmendum* of line 6b) was seen, in this context at least, as a type of violation.

[21] Calder, p. 175.

[22] 'I've heard tell that the king of glorious might, the creator of mankind, has granted to this tree that it alone, of all upward rising trees on earth, is the brightest in its blooms; never can anything bitter harm it with crimes, but it always will stand shielded, uninjured, while the world remains.'

This is the type of violation carried out on the tree in *Rood*. In this much-discussed poem about the creation of the cross of Christ, the tree relates how it was *aheawen hotes on ende* 'hewn down at the edge of the forest' and *astyred of stefne* removed from root' (*DR*, 29b-30a).[23] It was then *genaman* 'seized' by *strange feondas* 'strong enemies' and made into a *wæfersyne* 'spectacle' (*DR*, 30b-31a). At men's hands, it was turned into a cross and, after suffering alongside the Lord, thrown into a *deopan seaþe* 'deep pit' (*DR*, 75a) – a final degradation. But it is given a new life by God and becomes the *sigebeam* 'victory-tree' (*DR*, 13a), newly adorned with jewels and given a new purpose – namely, to act as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice and to save humankind. In the poem, there is a dual focus on the tree's natural beginning, wounding and humiliation, as well as on its value as an object. In the hands of wicked men, the tree is cut down and exploited as an object with which to perform a wicked deed, but God gives it a new worth; it is decorated and becomes *wædum geweorðode* 'ennobled by [its] garments' (*DR*, 15a). Now the focus is not on the tree's intrinsic worth, but on its worth as an object – an end product. This duality will be important as we move into a more detailed consideration of the tree riddles.

In both Riddles 53 and 73, the trees are depicted as thriving in their natural surroundings. There is much that is Paradisal about the descriptions, although their location is certainly not in Paradise: the various descriptions of flourishing (*weaxende*) and of abundance (*fægre*) and joy (*wynne*) are reminiscent of the wood in *The Phoenix*. The tree in Riddle 53 is particularly flourishing. Before it was cut down it was *tanum torhtne* 'bright in branches' and the wood was *weaxende* 'flourishing'. But the trees are not *gescylded* 'shielded' like the phoenix tree and they are therefore subject to

[23] Old English citation is from Michael Swanton, ed. and trans., *The Dream of the Rood* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1970).

afflictions of the post-lapsarian world. Even their nourishment by rain and water, though idyllic, is not Paradisal, since the trees in Paradise are not touched by rain, but bloom without the need for sustenance. Where with the phoenix tree *ne mæg him bitres wiht/scyldum sceððan* 'never can anything bitter harm it with crimes', the riddles' trees are harmed (*deope gedolgod*, in the case of Riddle 53), and killed by men perceived as 'enemies'. In Riddle 73, the men are *grome* 'grim' against it, whilst both trees suffer a form of violation: at the hands of human beings, they are turned into something that is *wiþ gesceape* 'against [their] nature' (R. 73, 6b).

Natural States, End Products

Sinners or criminals in the post-lapsarian world can wound and violate, and they have a malign relationship with the natural world. Yet, turning to commentaries on Christian doctrine, we are reminded that it was considered to be God's intention that humans use trees, primarily for food, but also for construction. *Omnia genera arborum utilia sint*, says Ambrose, *alia ad fructum nata, alia ad usum data*.[24] Ambrose gives the cedar as an example, which, he says, is useful for making the roof of a house.[25] Humanity has dominion over the living world and is entitled to the resources created by God. However, as Northcott puts it, 'according to the Biblical idea of covenant this dominion still involves the recognition of the distinctive integrity and order of each aspect of creation, both personal and impersonal'.[26] This interpretation of creation – of the individual value of not only the personal (human) but impersonal (animals and

[24] 'all species of trees have their utility […] some [trees] are created to provide fruit; others are granted for our use'. Latin text from *Sancti Ambrosii opera*, p. 95. Trans. from Savage, *Hexameron*, p. 107.
[25] *caedrus suspendendis tectorum apta culminibus, eo quod huiusmodi materies et procera sit spatiis nec onerosa parietibus*. 'The cedar is suitable for constructing the roof of a house, because its material is of such a kind as to furnish both spacious length for the roof and a quality of lightness for the walls'. Latin text from *Sancti Ambrosii opera*, p. 95. Trans. from Savage, *Hexameron*, p. 107-08.
[26] Northcott, p. 127.

plants) – is reflected in Ambrose's *Hexameron*: *singula autem eonim quae generantur e terris specialem quandam rationem habent, quae pro uirili portione conplent uniuersae plenitudinem creaturae*.[27] Yet, in the following metaphor from Augustine, we find the tree's integrity is at odds with its potential value as an object. The metaphor, using the traditional motif of God as craftsman, involves the carpenter and a fallen tree:

> Robur est ligni positum ante oculos; faber optimus vidit lignum non dolatum, de silva præcisum, adamavit: nescio quid inde vult facere. Non enim ad hoc amavit, ut semper sic maneat. In arte vidit quod futurum est, non in amore quod est; et amavit quod inde facturus est, non illud quod est. Sic et nos Deus amavit peccatores.[28]

The tree, if used by a 'good carpenter', is treated personally and with recognition for its potential value; the carpenter contemplates, lovingly, the product the wood will be turned into through his skills. However, the carpenter (whether the earthly carpenter or God) does not value the tree for its own identity but for the object that it will become. The riddles, typically non-conformist in their handling of subjects, go beyond doctrine in the attention they give to the natural integrity of the tree. In a playful reversal, the tree's state prior to human intervention is as important as its final appearance after shaping.

The main theme in Augustine's allegory is love; the shaper – whether the carpenter or God – is a benign individual who contemplates with care and devotion

[27] 'each and every thing which is produced from the earth has its own reason for existence, which, as far as it can, fulfils the general plan of creation'. Latin text from *Sancti Ambrosii opera*, p. 84.Trans. from Savage, *Hexameron*, p. 96.

[28] 'Imagine the trunk of a tree lying before you: a good carpenter may see such a piece of timber, unhewn, as it was cut in the forest. He loves it at sight, but because he means to make something out of it. The reason for his love is not that it may always remain what it is: as craftsman, he has looked at what it shall be, not as lover of what it is; and his love is set upon what he will make of it, not upon its present state. Even so has God loved us sinners.' Latin text from Augustine, *Opera Omnia*, Patrologia Latina, 35, ed. by J. P. Migne (Paris: Apud Garnier Fratres, 1846), p. 2042. Translation from Augustine, *Later Works*, trans. by John Burnaby, The Library of Christian Classics, 8 (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 324.

how the end product will look. The humans in Riddles 53 and 73 are not the craftsmen from Augustine's metaphor; they are enemies who inflict pain and suffering on the material. The contemplative nature of the craftsmanship described by Augustine contrasts particularly strongly with the work done to the tree in Riddle 53 where the *wunda* 'wounds' (R. 53, 7a) are fastened over in a way that seems to lack the art of craftsmanship. Craftsmanship in the riddles is that which is portrayed in Riddle 26 ('Bible'), where much time and attention is given to the process and the end result is something beautiful, adorned with *golde* 'gold', *gereno* 'ornaments' and *wuldorgesteald* 'glorious possessions' (R. 26, 14a, 15a and 16a). Indeed, the ornamentation of the object in Riddle 53 is more ambiguous. Though the tree is said to be *hyrstum/foran gefrætwed* 'adorned at the front with ornaments' (Riddle 53, 7b-8a), there is the sense that these words are used ironically, since it seems unusual for ornaments to be described as *wonnum* 'dark'. Ornamentation is used variously in the riddles, *frætwe* being employed in Riddle 7 to describe the bird's feathers as ornaments (R. 7, 6b), but it is usually bright or shining.[29] What we have in Riddle 53, then, is a description of object creation that is ambiguous about the nature of craftsmanship and humanity's use of materials.

Thus far we can observe a strong relationship between fallen humanity, the shaping of trees and the importance of the end product. Riddle 53 takes this relationship one step further, setting out not only to reverse the emphasis on the tree's potential value as a product in certain Christian allegories, but to problematise the reader's ability to name the finished product. It is no accident, I suggest, that critics have produced such diverse readings and solutions; the riddle's ambiguity allows the

[29] In Riddle 14, for example, the horn is described as being *beorhtne* 'bright' in its ornaments (R. 14, 7b), whilst in Riddle 20 the sword's decorative wire is similarly *beorht* 'bright' (R. 20, 3b). In Riddle 40, Creation is said to be *fægerre frætwum goldes* 'fairer than ornaments of gold' (R. 40, 46a-b).

reader to design the object his or herself. The riddle allows for more than one reading of its subject.

Riddle 53 is told from a third-person perspective and is much harder to solve than Riddle 73, being distinctly vaguer in nature. There is a lack of detail surrounding the nature of the object's use, and the ambiguity allows for more than one interpretation of the end product.[30] The opportunity for personal interpretations is ensured by both the last few lines of the riddle, where we are unable to fathom out what the object is doing,[31] and by the indefinite description of the ornamentation – is it ugly or is it beautiful? What is more, the word *hyrstum* can mean 'with adornments' as well as 'with equipment', which opens the object up to various interpretations. Does the reader see the tree as degraded, as Wilcox does, or venerated, like Whitman? Readers can interpret the object as something hideous, like a gallows, or beautiful, like a cross, because the ambiguous nature of the language describing it allows them to do so. We can read the riddle, perhaps, as a mirroring, in textual form, of the process of creating objects from trees. Readers, then, have a role to play as the tree's shaper. Does the reader play the 'sinful enemy' and turn it into something degraded, or play a more virtuous individual and venerate it?

Riddle 53 leads us back to the idea presented at the start of this chapter, that the riddles draw attention to humanity's fallen condition and its God-given supremacy over the created world. The riddle causes us to reflect back on ourselves and ask whether, as part of the fallen race, we would see the shaped tree as a chance to engage in wicked activities or rather, perhaps, in spiritual reflection. It is up to the

[30] For a discussion of the variety of possible solutions for Riddle 53, including eight wooden objects, see Neville, 'The *Exeter Book Riddles*' Precarious Insights into Wooden Artefacts', in *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World*, Medieval History and Archaeology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 122-43 (see especially pp. 130-39).

[31] Whitman gives a brief account of how scholars, particularly those who prefer the 'battering-ram' solution, have tried and failed to interpret the action successfully (p. 1).

reader to see the intrinsic worth of the tree and its potentiality as a positive symbol. In this sense, the riddle is like Riddle 12 ('ox' or 'leather'), where the reader must decide whether the drunken maidservant is engaged in a sexual act or an innocent act of cleaning or manufacture; the sinful mind might see the act as sexual, whilst the purer mind might see it as more innocent.[32] Due to the provocative language in the riddle, the likeliness of the reader not seeing any sexual innuendo at all is slim and reminds us that we are all part of the fallen race and, as such, struggle to see the use and misuse of objects through anything but the eyes of sinners.

It is interesting to reflect here on the fallen nature of the dreamer in *Rood* and what this nature reveals about the nature of sin and shaping in the Anglo-Saxon imagination. The dreamer is said to be by *synnum fah* 'sins stained' and *forwunded mid wommum* 'badly wounded by faults' (*DR*, 13b-14a), and this description is strikingly similar to the wounding of trees in the riddles. Furthermore, when the dreamer sees the tree he is also said to be with *sorgum gedrefed* 'afflicted by sorrow' (*DR*, 20b), drawing further connections between dreamer and *beam*. By thinking of the dreamer as afflicted and wounded like a felled tree, we can consider him as 'material' that is in need of shaping. We might see him as the sinful human of Augustine's metaphor, who needs to be 'shaped' by God's love into something new and better. The dreamer's 'shaping' comes through the dream's revelation and the tree's desire

[32] John W. Tanke has briefly argued for a similar moral principle in Riddle 12, suggesting that 'the "original" purpose of the riddle is for the riddler to lure the solver to propose the sexual solution, in order then to expose his salacious imagination'. See Tanke, '*Wonfeax Wale:* Ideology and Figuration in the Sexual Riddles of the Exeter Book', in *Class and Gender in Early English Literature: Intersections,* ed. by Britton J. Horwood and Gillian R. Overing (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 21-45 (pp. 28-29). See Rulon-Miller, 'Sexual Humor', for a discussion of lines 7b-13a as female masturbation and a reflection on the circulation of the riddles within the 'homoerotically charged atmosphere of a medieval monastery' (p. 101). For a similar discussion see Sarah L. Higley, 'The Wanton Hand: Reading and Reaching into Grammars and Bodies in Old English Riddle 12', in *Naked Before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Benjamin C. Withers and Jonathan Wilcox (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003), pp. 29-59. A more innocent solution is given by Wyatt, who says 'the process seems to be those of cleaning boots', arguing that 'if the proud lady wears them, probably the Welsh slave would have to clean them' (Wyatt, pp. 72-3).

for its story to be told. Thus, like many of the riddle's subjects that have been turned from material to object, the dreamer will assume a new task: he will *onwreoh wordum* 'reveal in words' the story of the tree. The nature of the narrator's shaping and his new task lead us to this thought-provoking realisation: in the Anglo-Saxon imagination, a human can change a material, like a fallen tree, into an object that is new and better, but an object, in the form of the message-bearing rood tree, also has the power to turn material, in the form of the un-shaped human, into something new and better, too. Another example of this beneficial relationship between shaped natural resource comes in the second half of Riddle 26, where the object's uses are revealed:

> Nu þa gereno ond se reada telg
> ond þa wuldorgesteald wide mære
> dryhtfolca helm– nales dol wite.
> Gif min bearn wera brucan willað,
> hy beoð þy gesundran ond þy sigefæstran,
> heortum þy hwætran ond þy hygebliþran,
> ferþe þy frodran; habbaþ freonda þy ma
> swæsra ond gesibbra, soþra ond godra,
> tilra ond getreowra, þa hyra tyr ond ead
> estum ycað, ond hy arstafum,
> lissom bilecgað, ond hi lufan fæþmum
> fæste clyppað. Frige hwæt ic hatte
> niþum to nytte; nama min is mære,
> hæleþum gifre ond halig sylf.
> (R. 26, 16a-28b)[33]

[33] 'Now the ornaments and the red dye and the glorious possessions widely proclaim the people's protector not the afflictions of hell. If the children of men wish to use me they will be the safer and the more victorious, bolder in their hearts and the happier in their minds; wiser in spirit. (They will) have more friends, dearer and closer, truer and more virtuous, better and more loyal, who will gladly increase and cover them with benefits (and) kindnesses and clasp them firmly with embraces of love. Find what I am called, useful to people. My name is renowned, a gift to men, and is itself holy.' I follow Tupper's translation of *nales dole wite* as 'pains of hell'. As Tupper notes, *wite* 'often implies "eternal punishment"' (Tupper, *Riddles*, p. 130). For a brief discussion of the meaning of *wite* and its contexts see Nicole Marafioti, 'Earthly Justice and Spiritual Consenquences: Juding and Punishing in the Old English Consolation of Philosophy', in *Capital and Corporal Punishment in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Jay Paul Gates and Nicole Marafioti (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), pp. 113-30 (pp. 118-19).

The Bible, transformed from a living entity and adorned with treasures like the rood tree, helps the user to gain, among other things, happiness, wisdom and better, more loyal friends. The Bible helps the individual flourish in a community, providing him with many *freonda* that will be loyal, kind and true.

Si qua ergo in Christo nova creatura, it is said in 2 Corinthians, *vetera transierunt: ecce facta sunt nova* (2 Corinthians, 5.17).[34] A human can achieve this transformation into something new with the help of an object, and this process is different from other transformation processes depicted in the Exeter Book, where it is depicted as self-exile in a hostile landscape, the relinquishing of the material world and all its comforts, that is the catalyst for spiritual change. As 'wounded' and 'afflicted' materials that were once in need of shaping, both the narrator of *Rood* and the rood tree share an affinity and an anticipation for redemption that unite humanity and the natural world. The affinity they share stands in contrast to the estranged and hostile relationship between humanity and the natural world in the Old English elegies.

As a final illumination of the human-tree relationship, we can turn to the Exeter Book poem *Resignation,* a poem in which no such spiritual change occurs, and to the narrator's negative contrast of himself to a thriving tree. Here, in lines 105a-8a, the narrator considers how he is unable to flourish because of the social situation he is now in, his estrangement from his fellow human beings:

> Wudu mot him weaxan, wyrde bidan,
> tanum lædan; ic for tæle ne mæg
> ænigne moncynnes mode gelufian
> eorl on eþle.
>
> (*Rgn*, 105a-8a)[35]

[34] 'If then any be in Christ a new creature, the old things are passed away, behold all things are made new.'
[35] 'A tree has the opportunity to flourish, endure its fate, produce branches; I, on account of the calumny, cannot love anyone of the race of mankind in my heart, [any] man [of my] native land.'

The man cannot love his fellows *for tæle*, which refers to the narrator's earlier lamentation, *min gewyrhto wæron / micle fore monnum* 'my transgressions were great in the presence of men' (*Rgn*, 80b-81a). Alvin A. Lee suggests we read lines 105a-8a as a 'contrast between the man out of charity with his fellows, and therefore unable to thrive spiritually, and the tree which does flourish as it should'.[36] Read in this way, the passage stands as a contrast to the affinity between human and tree in *Rood*. In *Resignation*, the *wudu weaxende* serves as a point of contrast to the narrator rather than a point of familiarity. Because of his situation, his inability to achieve spiritual progression and his estrangement from the community, the man is unable to 'flourish'. Berkhout compares these lines with Job 14.7-10, in which the death of a tree is differentiated from the death of a human being:

> Lignum habet spem;
> Si praecisum fuerit, rursum virescit,
> Et rami eius pullulant.
> Si senuerit in terra radix eius,
> Et in pulvere emortuus fuerit truncus illius,
> Ad odorem aquae germinabit,
> Et faciet comam, quasi cum primum plantatum est.
> Homo vero cum mortuus fuerit, et nudatus,
> Atque consumptus, ubi, quaeso, est?
> (Job, 14.7-10)[37]

'Although the speaker of *Resignation* is very much alive,' says Berkhout, drawing a connection between the passages from Job and the Exeter Book poem, 'he has

[36] Alvin A. Lee, *The Guest-Hall of Eden: Four Essays on the Design of Old English Poetry* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 418.

[37] 'A tree hath hope: if it be cut, it groweth green again, and the boughs thereof sprout.
If its root be old in the earth, and its stock be dead in the dust:
At the scent of water, it shall spring, and bring forth leaves, as when it was first planted.
But man when he shall be dead, and stripped and consumed, I pray you where is he?'

nevertheless experienced a spiritual death from which, unlike the tree's death, there is no hope of gratuitous regeneration'.[38] For Berkhout, the poem's allusion to Job 14.7-10 is a reflection on the difference, rather than affinity, between humanity and nature. The allusion, he says,

> stresses the essential difference in the divine order between created nature (still in harmony) and created but fallen man. Both are subject to the inexorable laws of God's governance, expressed here as *wyrd* (107, 118), which sustains the natural life of one but punishes the unregenerate decay of the other.[39]

Unlike the dreamer in *Rood*, who has been aided by the transformed tree to lead an enlightened spiritual life, or the Bible-reader who gains *freonda þy ma* with the help of the slaughtered animal, the narrator of Resignation, *earm* 'impoverished', an *anhoga* 'solitary one' (*Rgn*, 89a-b), merely sees himself in contrast to, not in cooperation with, the shorn tree. In this dialogue between Job 4.7-10 and *Resignation*, a tree, though cropped or cut down, *habet spem* 'hath hope' (Job, 14.7), it has the opportunity (*mot*) to *weaxan* 'flourish', whereas the narrator has no such opportunity. In contrast to *Rood* and Riddles 53 and 73, the focus is not on the production of a new creation through the wounding and shaping of the *wudu*, but rather on the regeneration of the existing plant as it lives in the earth; the narrator is unable to find the connection between himself and the tree, as entities living in post-lapsarian world, condemned equally to suffer. Empathy and understanding of the tree's plight comes from both a recognition of the affinity between nature and the human self and from the awakened mind of the spiritual individual.

[38] Carl T. Berkhout, 'The Speaker in "Resignation": A Biblical Note', *Notes and Queries*, 219 (1974), 122-3 (p. 122).
[39] Berkhout, p. 123.

Conclusions

It is clear to see how looking beyond the riddles' answers and considering their literal narratives of shaping and creating can be beneficial to our understanding of Anglo-Saxon attitudes to the natural world. Using the principles of modern eco-theology, I have endeavoured to show how there was no 'mood of indifference' towards the suffering of the natural world in these Old English riddles, but rather an appreciation of the integrity of living things. The acts of shaping and creating are important to this eco-theological reading, with the riddles demonstrating how a human being has the power to shape material into an object both with the hands and with the imagination. Lastly, Augustine's carpenter metaphor reveals how humans, too, could be perceived as material waiting to be shaped – in this instance by the hands of a loving God. This notion, I suggest, creates an affiliation between humans and organic materials, a positive affiliation that echoes the principles of modern eco-theology and broadens our knowledge of Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards the created world.

5.
‘fruman agette / eall of earde’:
The Principle of Accountability
in Riddle 83

Riddle 83 depicts its subject, ore, being taken out of the earth by miners and turned into money; it can then enact a form of revenge on humans through the establishment of *hæftnyd* ‘captive bonds’ (R. 83, 9b). The writer employs a human social metaphor of ancestral usurpation and destruction; the narrator’s ancestors, its *fromcynn*, are removed from their *earde* ‘native land’ by a *fah* ‘hostile one’ (R. 83, 7a-8a & 4b). This metaphor, in part, leads Marie Nelson to argue that ‘[the subject’s] humanity is more discernible than its identity’ and to propose that the answer to the enigma is ‘human being’.[1] I suggest that, despite the riddle-writer’s use of the human social metaphor, Riddle 83 more readily invites an ecocentric, as opposed to anthropocentric, reading. In its depiction, through the use of metaphor, of the removal of ore, the riddle speaks to two of Buell’s tenets of environmental texts. These tenets are that ‘human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation’ and that ‘the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history’.[2] The text

[1] Nelson, ‘Rhetoric of the Riddles’, p. 427.
[2] Buell, p. 7.

implicates humanity in the ore's destruction and claims that the ore has its own history, a history that is destroyed by the violent actions of human beings. In this chapter, I discuss the ecological underpinnings of Riddle 83, connecting humanity's use of its resources to the post-lapsarian relationship between humans and nature. In doing so, I also compare the riddle to the depiction of mining in Job 28.1-11, which has been celebrated for its ecological underpinnings but which is substantially more anthropocentric than Riddle 83.

Beyond the Human Metaphor

Let us turn directly to the full text of Riddle 83. In this riddle, the narrator, ore, relates its history and how it has been turned into money for human use:

> Frod wæs min fromcynn [……]
> biden in burgum, siþþan bæles weard
> [.....] wera lige bewunden,
> fyre gefælsad. Nu me fah warað
> eorþan broþor, se me ærest wearð
> gumena to gyrne. Ic ful gearwe gemon
> hwa min fromcynn fruman agette
> eall of earde; ic him yfle ne mot,
> ac ic hæftnyd hwilum arære
> wide geond wongas. Hæbbe ic wunda fela,
> middangeardes mægen unlytel,
> ac ic miþan sceal monna gehwylcum
> degolfulne dom dyran cræftes,
> siðfæt minne. Saga hwæt ic hatte.
> (R. 83, 1a-14b)[3]

[3] 'My ancestry was old […], I lived in towns, since guardian of fire […] of men's, surrounded by flame, purified by fire. Now the hostile one, earth's brother, holds me, the one who, of those men, first caused me affliction. I remember very well who destroyed all my ancestry from its land. I am not permitted to do evil to him, but at times I establish captive bonds throughout the world. I have many wounds and great strength on earth. But I must conceal my course from all men, my secret power and costly cunning. Say what I am called.'

Unfortunately there is a manuscript lacuna between 1a and 2b and in 3a, but the narrative is otherwise easy to follow. The subject describes how it was taken from the land by men – *eorþan broþor* 'earth's brother' (R.83, 5a), and purified by fire.[4] The subject then describes how, now that it is in human hands, it has the power to create enslaving bonds on earth, a power which it must keep a secret.[5] That coin is the subject is not to be doubted; ore is a resource removed from the ground, transformed by heat (fire) into coins and then used as currency. A human being *warað* 'holds' or 'possesses' it (R. 83, 4b), and it is easy to image a coin being held in a human hand. The wounds given to the subject are the imprints created by stamps[6] and the bonds that the subject establishes are of a financial nature, as Williamson suggests.[7]

Nelson's assertion that, because of the rhetoric employed in the riddles, the subject of Riddle 83 'is a human being' is typical of the way critics side-line the created world as victim in the Exeter Book riddle collection in favour of anthropocentric readings. Like Mitchell's interpretation of Riddle 1 as 'army', discussed in this study's introduction, Nelson favours Riddle 83's human story, summing it up thus:

[4] Dietrich and Tupper suggest 'earth's brother' is Tubal-Cain (Dietrich, p. 484; Tupper, p. 221). See also Murphy (pp. 142-51) for a discussion and defence of this suggestion. I agree with Williamson that 'it does not seem likely that the smith who presently (*Nu me...warað*) guards and heats (lines 1-4a) the creature is the same man of the past...who stole the creature from its home in the ground', and that instead 'the enemy here is man in all his guises - miner, smelter, forger, and artisan' (*Riddles*, p. 376).

[5] John D. Niles suggests lines 12a-14a are to do with fines as punishment: 'What might seem at first to be an enigmatic claim in lines 12-14a, that the speaker sometimes withholds its secretive power, requires little wit to interpret: persons who fall afoul of the law can sometimes avoid corporal punishment through monetary payment…People living in Anglo-Saxon England might have taken [*dyran cræftes*] as an allusion to the custom whereby persons found guilty of certain crimes were legally entitled to pay a fine (the *heals-fang*) in order to escape a flogging'. See Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems and the Play of the Texts*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages, 13 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), p. 134. Though I believe these lines to be trickier to interpret than Niles suggests, I have yet to find a more convincing interpretation. It is for this reason I have translated *dyran* as 'costly'.

[6] Williamson, *Riddles*, p. 369. Some editors supply *wundra* instead of *wunda*, though it is clear from my own study of the facsimile that the word is *wunda* and I see no reason to alter its spelling or meaning.

[7] Another of Williamson's suggestions (*Riddles*, p. 366).

> the metal-human subject has a lineage; he may have a soul purified by fire; he has an enemy; he wishes or at least considers doing evil to his enemy; he can conceal his own power; and he even speaks of his 'adventure' or 'journey hence,' either phrase suggesting the kind of journey not taken by any but human beings.[8]

As part of her argument, Nelson says that '[the subject's] humanity is more discernible than his identity, which is not as certain as my title "Ore" would suggest, since other solutions like "gold" and "money" have been proposed',[9] yet I find this aspect of the argument unpersuasive. This is because scholars approaching this riddle seem to have no difficulty in ascertaining its answer, and any variations in critics' answers are only minor;[10] solutions like 'gold' and 'money' have been proposed, but ore, gold and money are one and the same thing.[11] Contrary to Nelson's belief, the solution is actually very certain; the proper solution, we might say, is 'ore that has been turned into money'. Indeed Niles, persuasively arguing that the Exeter Book riddles are best served when answers are provided in Old English, says that Riddle 83 actually has 'an elegant one-word solution, *ōra*, that satisfies all its conditions', as he explains:

> The primary meaning of this grammatically weak masculine noun is 'ore, metal in an unreduced state'. In this sense it denotes the raw source of any metal, whether gold ore, silver ore, iron ore, lead ore, or any other. The same word denotes 'metal', for it occurs (in the dative plural inflection) as a gloss on Latin *metallis*. In addition, there exists an OE homophone, also spelled *ōra*, that denotes a small silver coin that was produced in large quantities in late Anglo-Saxon England, often being used in an effort to buy off Viking raiders with cash. Punning on these various senses of the word, the author of

[8] Nelson, 'Rhetoric of the Riddles', p. 427.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 427.
[10] Dietrich (p. 484), Tupper (*Riddles*, p. 220) and Krapp and Dobbie (ASPR 3, p. 373) all agree on the solution 'ore', whilst Trautmann suggests 'money' (*BBA*, p. 131). W. S. Mackie offers 'metal' or 'gold'. See Mackie, ed., *The Exeter Book*, *Part II, Poems IX-XXXII*, EETS (New York: Kraus, 1987), p. 242. Williamson agrees with Mackie, taking 'gold' as the solution (*Riddles*, p. 366). Wyatt brings all these variations together with the solution 'ore, metal, money' (p. 118).
[11] The subject is first ore (perhaps gold ore, but this is largely irrelevant), when it is taken from the ground, and then money after the transformation process by fire.

> Riddle 83 presents us with a speaker that is at one and the same time ore in the ground, metal that results from the process of smelting, the iron of which fetters are made, and coins that can mitigate punishment.[12]

By providing a 'felicitous answer' in Old English,[13] Niles has solved what Nelson sees as an interpretive problem. The playful pun on *ōra* – one that is lost when we provide a modern English answer – challenges the notion that '[the subject's] humanity is more discernible than his identity'.[14]

Building on Nelson's foundations, one might argue that a narrative in which ancestors are destroyed and driven from their homeland reveals contemporary anxieties about war, usurpation and exile, rather than anxieties about humanity's use of ore. Yet the purpose of a metaphor is to depict an object or scenario that is 'different from but analogous to' the literal subject being described.[15] A metaphor's function is to draw a comparison between two different subjects. Thus, as I stated in the introduction to this thesis, to use the violent, unjust usurpation of human beings from a native land as a metaphor for the removal of ore is to suggest the removal of ore is itself violent and unjust.

Interpreting the metaphor as speaking to the plight of the natural world as much as the plight of human beings, the ore can be viewed as a victim of human actions, specifically of those men who were the *ærest* 'first' cause of its *gyrne* 'affliction' or 'sorrow' (R.83, 5b-6a). The riddle-poet uses the word *agette* to describe the removal of the ore from the ground, and this is a word that can be interpreted diversely to suit

[12] Niles, pp. 134-5.
[13] *Ibid*., p. 139.
[14] Nelson, 'Rhetoric of the Riddles', p. 427.
[15] 'Metaphor, *n*.', OED 3rd ed. 2001. OED Online. Oxford University Press. November 2014. <http://dictionary.oed.com/>

both the metaphoric and literal narratives. The word *ageotan* has different connotations in Old English;[16] it can mean 'destroyed', as in the Old English *Exodus*:

> Se ðe sped ahte
> ageat gylp wera; hie wið God wunnon.
> (*Exodus*, 88b-89b) [17]

and *The Battle of Brunanburh*:

> Þær læg secg mænig
> garum ageted,
> (*Brn*, 17b-18a)[18]

But it can also be translated as 'drain' or 'empty', as in *Judith*:

> Swa se inwidda ofer ealne dæg
> dryhtguman sine drencte mid wine,
> swiðmod sinces brytta, oðþæt hie on swiman lagon,
> oferdrencte his duguðe ealle, swlyce hie wæron deaðe geslegene,
> agotene goda gehwylces.
> (*Jth*, 28a-32a) [19]

Here the men, drenched by alcohol, are said to be drained of virtue, or goodness, as a result of their drinking. There is a playful antithesis here between 'drenched' and 'drained', as Marsden notes,[20] which demonstrates a creative use of the word *agotene* by an Anglo-Saxon poet. Henry Sweet records *ageotan* as meaning to 'pour out, shed (blood)' in one sense and to 'melt, found' in another, with reference to metal images.[21]

[16] Williamson also has extensive notes on the word *agette* (*Riddles,* p. 368).
[17] 'The one who possessed power destroyed the boast of men; they had warred with God.'
[18] 'There lay many warriors, destroyed by spears.'
[19] So the foe, the arrogant giver of treasure, drenched his warriors with wine throughout the day until they lay in a stupor, his whole retinue completely soaked; in such a way they were struck [as] by death, drained of every virtue.'
[20] Marsden, *The Cambridge Old English Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 150, n. 31.
[21] Henry Sweet, *The Student's Dictionary of Anglo-Saxon* (New York: Macmillan, 1897).

As readers of Riddle 83, we are invited to simultaneously imagine both a shedding of blood and the drawing out of metal from the ground.

It might be tempting to draw a similarity between the meaning of *agette* as 'drained' in Riddle 83 and the modern problem of draining the world of its resources. Yet, not only is it difficult to visualise ore being 'drained' from the ground, but, the modern concern that humanity is using up all the earth's resources would not have been felt in the Anglo-Saxon world; miners did not take ore out of the ground at the same rate and volume as we do today. The anxiety expressed in the riddle, then, is unlike today's anxiety about humanity's use and abuse of the earth. Rather, it is about the injustice of taking the ore from the ground, the loss of its natural state and the destruction of its own history. It is accountability, but accountability to the resources rather than to the world as a whole.

Resource use and exploitation are key themes in the Exeter Book riddle collection, as we have seen in previous chapters, and come to the fore in Riddle 83. As an ecocentric text, the riddle speaks to Buell's third tenet of eco-poetry, which states that 'human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation'.[22] To explore what Buell means here, we can turn to an example he gives of this type of poem, namely, William Wordsworth's 'Nutting'. The poem's description of the narrator's destruction of a hazel grove is worth quoting at some length here:

> …Then up I rose,
> And dragged to earth both branch and bough, with crash
> And merciless ravage: and the shady nook
> Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,
> Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up
> Their quiet being: and, unless I now
> Confound my present feelings with the past;
> Ere from the mutilated bower I turned

[22] Buell, p. 7.

> Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,
> I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
> The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky.—[23]

In this 'self-incriminating tale',[24] the narrator looks back with regret on his act of violence against a part of the natural world. The hazel bush is passive, a quality suggested by its patience and quietness. In Riddle 83, an act of violence is carried out against the ore, resulting in the destruction of a similarly passive part of the natural world. Yet, in a mark of contrast to the Romantic poem, the natural world incriminates humanity, *eorþan broþor* 'Earth's brother', making it accountable for the violent destruction of the ore's ancient ancestry. It is ironic that a kinsman of the earth ('Earth's brother') should also be the earth's destroyer. Humanity is seen as an enemy, a *fah* 'hostile one' (R. 83, 4b), to whom the ore *ne mot* 'may not' cause *yfle* 'harm' (R. 83, 8a-b). Its agency only comes later, in establishing *hæftnyd* 'captive bonds' throughout the world – *wide geond wongas* (R. 83, 10a). This is unlike the hazel bushes, which 'patiently gave up / Their quiet being' and, 'mutilated' and 'silent', are unable to exact revenge.

The actions of humanity against an ancient piece of the natural world in Riddle 83 are perceived as violent and unjust, as opposed to necessary or skilled – a case of post-lapsarian exploitation rather than 'benign symbiosis'.[25] As discussed in previous chapters, the post-lapsarian world is one in which the relationship between human beings and nature is strained, in which the natural world suffers for humanity's original sin. Humans are not so much custodians as enemies that cause nature suffering through violent and (sometimes) careless acts against it.

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[23] William Wordsworth, 'Nutting', in Stephen Gill, ed., *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 75-6 (lines 43-53).
[24] Buell, p. 8.
[25] Ovitt, p. 489.

Another example of a violent act against nature by human beings in the riddle collection can be found in Riddle 77, and its short narrative is worth considering here. As noted in Chapter 1, the subject, an oyster, first relates how it was nurtured by the natural world:

> Sæ mec fedde, sundhelm þeahte,
> ond mec yþa wrugon eorþan getenge,
> feþelease; oft ic flode ongean
> muð ontynde.
> (R. 77, 1a-2b)[26]

The oyster then relates how it is prised open and eaten by a man:

> Nu wile monna sum
> min flæsc fretan; felles ne recceð
> siþþan he me of sidan seaxes orde
> hyd arypeð, […]ec hr[.]þe siþþan
> iteð unsodene ea[……]d.
> (R. 77, 4b-8a)[27]

There is a note of condemnation in these lines, a sense that the man is indifferent to the creature and to the casing that has housed it; he *ne recceð* 'does not care for' or is 'not interested in' the oyster's casing. He is also violent with the subject; he *arypeð* 'rips' the oyster's skin from its *sidan* 'side' and is then said to *fretan* 'eat' it (R. 77, 5b-7a). Mercedes Salvador argues that *fretan* 'eat' is a term used negatively in Old English poetry, being used to describe the way *Beowulf*'s Grendel devours his victims,

[26] 'The sea fed me, the ocean's top roofed me, and waves covered me, lying on the earth, without the ability to walk. I often opened my mouth towards the waves.'

[27] 'Now some man will devour my flesh, not caring for my casing, when he with knife point rips skin from my side, and then quickly eats me...' Like Krapp and Dobbie (ASPR, III, p. 370) and Williamson, (Riddles, p. 357), I accept Ferdinand Holthausen's reconstruction of line 7b as *[ond m]ec hr[a]þe siþþan*. See Holthausen, 'Zur Textkritik altenglischer Dichtungen', *Englische Studien*, 17 (1907), 198-211 (p. 209).

for example.[28] When compared with Aldhelm's riddle about a mussel (Riddle 17 'purple-mussel'), Riddle 77's condemnation becomes more obvious:

> E gemmis nascor per ponti cærula concis
> Vellera setigero producens corpora fluva;
> En clamidem pepli necnon et pabula pulpæ
> Confero: sic duplex fati persolvo tributum.[29]

This is an example of humans making good use of the natural world. There is no wastage here, but quite the opposite, as the hair – the part that is not eaten – is used for dyeing. There is also no sense of exploitation, no act of violence, and the sea creature seems accepting of its fate; indeed, it gives itself up to *fati* 'fate', as if it is its destiny to be used by human beings. Aldhelm does not portray the sea as a nurturing dwelling place either, thus providing no contrast between the subject's early life in the natural world and the final stage of its life in the hands of a human. In contrast, the oyster, like the ore, suffers in a post-lapsarian world in which human beings use and abuse their resources in a way perceived to be careless and violent.

Nature's Ancient Ancestry

The second of Buell's tenets of eco-poetry that is applicable to Riddle 83 is that 'the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history'.[30] A similar,

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[28] Mercedes Salvator, 'The Oyster and the Crab: A Riddle Duo (nos.77 and 78) in the Exeter Book', *Modern Philology*, 101 (2004), 400-419 (pp. 402-403).

[29] 'From twin shells in the blue sea I was born,
And by my hairy body turn soft wool
A tawny-red. Lo, gorgeous robes I give,
And of my flesh provide men food besides:
A double tribute thus I pay to Fate.' (Pitman, p. 11-12)

[30] Buell, p. 7.

though more theologically-centred approach to this idea is that 'history takes place in nature, and nature itself has a history, as the common creation story clearly demonstrates'.[31] Riddle 83 speaks to both of these tenets, with history being a central part of the text – indeed, its theme is established from the beginning with the opening words *frod wæs min fromcynn* 'my ancestry was old'. The riddle suggests that the ore has its own history, its own ancient ancestry and *earde* 'native land' (R. 83, 8a).[32] But there is also the suggestion that humans shape the natural world and its history. Humanity is explicitly implicated in the removal of the ore's ancestry from the ground and its current situation, showing that, if not human *history*, then at least humans, can impact on natural history.

A riddle that also speaks to these tenets is Riddle 84. In this riddle, discussed for its depiction of an Eden-like beginning in Chapter 1, we get glimpses of a world that is far older than humanity and has its own past and ancestry. The subject is presented as being part of a deep history that is more powerful and mysterious than humans can know or imagine or even express in words. It begins:

> An wiht is on eorþan wundrum acenned,
> hreoh ond reþe; hafað ryne strongne,
> grimme grymetað, ond be grunde fareð.
> Modor is monigra mærra wihta.
> Fæger ferende fundað æfre;
> neol is nearograp. Nænig oþrum mæg
> wlite ond wisan wordum gecyþan,
> hu mislic biþ mægen þara cynna,
> fyrn forðgesceaft; fæder ealle bewat,
> or ond ende, swylce an sunu,
> mære meotudes bearn þurh [.....]ed

[31] Sallie McFague, 'Human Beings, Embodiment, and Our Home the Earth', in *Reconstructing Christian Theology*, ed. by Rebecca S. Chopp and Mark Lewis Taylor (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), pp. 141-169 (p. 144).

[32] Murphy describes the riddle both as a transformation riddle and as 'a text inflected through a sense of history that traces the origin of ore back to its biblical roots' (p. 149).

ond þæt hyhste mæ[……]es [.]æ[….
(R. 84, 1a-12b)[33]

The next eight lines are obscured by a manuscript lacuna, but already we have a sense of the themes of the riddle and can deduce with some confidence that the subject is water. The subject is an ancient mother of *monigra mærra wihta* 'many marvellous creatures' (R. 84, 4b) and the narrator talks of her *cynna* 'kin' and her *fyrn forðsceaft* 'ancient lineage' (R. 84, 8b-9a), which tells us that she has a rich and deep history, including a great many kin that human beings cannot begin to count. Her history is one that is beyond human history; she is, we discover later in the text, *hæleþum frodra* 'older than heroes' (R. 84, 36b). Indeed, we know from the Genesis narrative that water was created before humanity, and the riddle says that God (the *fæder* 'father') *bewat* 'watched over' her *or* 'origin' (R. 84, 9b-10a). The riddle speaks primarily to the eco-theological notion that 'nature itself has a history',[34] but it also brings the two histories – the history of humanity and the history of water – together in what is a bold ecological statement that has its roots in creationism. Simply put, that statement is: the natural world has its own history, a deep history, which human beings cannot fully comprehend or measure.

Transformation and Concealment

Water is an ancient entity that can be used by humans[35] but which cannot be shaped by them in these riddles; its only means of transformation – into *bane* 'bone', i.e. 'ice'

[33] 'There is a creature on earth, born through wonders, violent and raging; she fiercely roars. She has a bold course and journeys by land. She is mother of many splendid creatures; the beautiful travelling one always hastens. Deep down is her tight grasp. No one can convey in words to another her appearance and manner, how manifold the strength of her race is, her ancient ancestry. The Father saw it all, her origin and end, likewise the only Son, the Creator's famous child, through...and the highest power of the holy spirit.'
[34] McFague, p. 144.
[35] It is *eadgum leof, earmum getæse* 'dear to the rich, useful to the poor' (R. 84, 28a-b).

– is a natural one, a *wundor* 'miracle' (R. 69, 1a-b). Ore, in contrast, is an ancient entity that can be used and shaped by humans. The ore's ancestry has been destroyed, its natural state transformed through melting and wounding, but the ore can take one comfort from its situation. There is, the riddle's narrator goes on to tell us, a form of revenge the transformed ore can enact on human beings through its newly found agency; it can *hæftnyd hwilum arære / wide geond wongas* 'sometimes establish captive bonds throughout the world' (R. 83, 9a-10a). As a coin, ore becomes part of the currency of human beings and finds reassurance in the fact that even though its *wunda* 'wounds' are *fela* 'many' its *mægen* 'power' is *unlytel* 'not small' (R. 83, 10b-11b). The implication here is that money has an enslaving quality; 'the curse of gold is legendary,' says Williamson, by way of explanation. 'Man,' he says, 'steals gold from the ground, and the gold in turn steals man's peace and stability'.[36]

In Riddle 83, the ore is turned into a powerful, crafty object that can *hæftnyd hwilum arære* 'sometimes establish captive bonds' (R. 83, 9a-b) through its new existence as money; the ore conceals its power and cunning in order to ensnare humanity, its enemy. In Christian theology, money has a negative quality; Scripture depicts greed for money as a vice and money as an object of material value that can ensnare humans or lead them astray.[37] For example, Christ refers to *deceptio divitiarum* 'the deceitfulness of riches' in the Parable of the Growing Seed (Mark, 4.19).[38] The scriptures depict money as a snare in order to teach humans not seek its

[36] Williamson, *Riddles*, p. 366. Williamson cites *Beowulf* here and the poem's 'gold-adorned heirlooms' which, he says, act as 'symbols of the feud – past, present, and future'.

[37] In the New Testament money is famously called *radix enim omnium malorum* 'the root of all evils' (1 Timothy, 6.10). In 1 Timothy it is also said: *nam qui volunt divites fieri incidunt in temptationem et laqueum et desideria multa inutilia et nociva quae mergunt homines in interitum et perditionem* 'they that will become rich fall into temptation and into the snare of the devil and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition' (1 Timothy, 6.9).

[38] *et aerumnae saeculi et deceptio divitiarum et circa reliqua concupiscentiae introeuntes suffocant verbum et sine fructu efficitur*, 'And the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts after other things

dark ways. Thus, it makes sense that the ore of Riddle 83 says it *miþan sceal* 'must conceal' its *degolfulne dom* 'secret power' and its *dyran cræftes* 'precious cunning' from *monna gehwylcum* 'all men' (R.83, 12a-14a). In Riddle 83, the ore takes on the cunning and deceitfulness of the Bible's personified money.

The process of transformation turns the ore from a passive resource into an active object in the world; but the conversion of a natural material into a manmade item is a negative conversion not a positive one. As a crafty object, the ore *miþan sceal monna gehwylcum* 'must conceal [its] way from all men' (R. 83, 12a-b). This relationship between humans and their resources is the opposite of the relationship envisioned in the passage from Ambrose's *Hexameron*, in which Nature describes its suffering and toil in the post-lapsarian world. The exemplum offered to humans by Ambrose of a good, harmonious relationship between all parts of nature is depicted as unsuccessful here in Riddle 83. Like the rest of nature, ore is *corruptionis subditus seruituti*;[39] changed into something unnatural, it, too, has the power to corrupt.

In its depiction of negative transformation, Riddle 83 invites comparisons to *The Dream of the Rood*. Both texts depict a subject's removal from its original dwelling place by human beings and a transformation into an object. The ore says it *ful gearwe gemon* 'remembers very well' who *fromcynn fruman agette / eall of eared* 'drained all [its] ancestry out of its land' (R. 83, 6b-8a), and this act of remembering, poignant and angry, is similar to the lines in *Rood* where the tree can *gyta geman* 'still remember' how it was *aheawen* 'cut down' in the forest by men perceived as enemies (R. 83, 28b-29b). But, in a point of contrast to *Rood*, the transformed material in Riddle 83 does not *reveal* to humanity but *conceals* from it. In *Rood*, the narrator's account of the

entering in choke the word, and it is made fruitless' (Mark, 4.19). The implication is that love of money, like other vices, will prevent humans from fully understanding the Word, 'choking' its metaphorical growth with material things of little worth.

[39] 'Subject to the service of corruption'.

crucifixion is a revelation, delivered in the form of a dream; but the tree is also the initiator of revelation, asking the dreamer to relate all he has learned in his dream to *mannum* 'men':

> Nu ic þe hate, hæleð min se leofa,
> þæt ðu þas gesyhðe secge mannum,
> onwreoh wordum þæt hit is wuldres beam,
> se ðe ælmihtig God on þrowode
> for mancynnes manegum synnum
> ond Adomes ealdgewyrhtum
> (*DR*, 95a-100b)[40]

The removal of the ore from its original dwelling place and its transformation does not lead to a positive revelation, as the tree's removal from *holtes on ende* 'the end of the woods' does (*DR*, 29b), but to the laying down of bonds and the concealment of power and cunning.

Riddle 83 and The Book of Job 28.1-11

A passage from The Book of Job can reveal further insights into the representation of the ore in Riddle 83. The passage, Job 28.1-11, describes the work of a miner and has been discussed by eco-theologians for its apparent ecological underpinnings. The narrator, possibly Job himself,[41] says:

> Habet argentum venarum suarum principia,
> Et auro locus est in quo conflatur.
> Ferrum de terra tollitur,
> Et lapis solutus calore in aes vertitur.
> Tempus posuit tenebris,

[40] 'Now I command you, my dear warrior, that you tell this vision to men, reveal in words that it is the tree of wonder on which the Almighty God suffered for mankind's many sins and Adam's deeds of old.'
[41] The identity of the narrator is a matter of debate. For a summary, see Alison Lo, *Job 28 As Rhetoric: An Analysis of Job 28 in the Context of Job 22-31* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 2. Some scholars, says Lo, see the speaker as Job, whilst others see the passage as 'an interlude or authorial comment'.

Et universorum finem ipse considerat,
Lapidem quoque caliginis et umbram mortis.
Dividit torrens a populo peregrinante,
Eos quos oblitus est pes egentis hominis, et invios.
Terra, de qua oriebatur panis,
In loco suo igni subversa est.
Locus sapphiri lapides eius,
Et glebae illius aurum.
Semitam ignoravit avis,
Nec intuitus est eam oculus vulturis.
Non calcaverunt eam filii institorum,
Nec pertransivit per eam leaena.
Ad silicem extendit manum suam,
Subvertit a radicibus montes.
In petris rivos excidit,
Et omne pretiosum vidit oculus eius.
Profunda quoque fluviorum scrutatus est,
Et abscondita in lucem produxit.[42]
(Job, 28.1-11)

This passage about mining is followed by a meditation on wisdom. *Sapientia vero ubi invenitur? Et quis est locus intelligentiae?* the narrator asks immediately afterwards (Job, 28.12).[43] In the second half of Job 28 it is suggested that humans can plumb the depths of the earth in search ore and precious gems but cannot so easily find wisdom, for *abscondita est ab oculis omnium viventium: volucres quoque caeli latet* (Job, 28.21).[44] Wisdom, like ore, dwells in a secret place – a place where humans and non-humans alike have not been and do not know.

[42] 'Silver hath beginnings of its veins, and gold hath a place wherein it is melted.
Iron is taken out of the earth, and stone melted with heat is turned into brass.
He hath set a time for darkness, and the end of all things he considereth, the stone also that is in the dark and the shadow of death.
The flood divideth from the people that are on their journey, those whom the food of the needy man hath forgotten, and who cannot be come at.
The land, out of which bread grew in its place, hath been overturned with fire.
The stones of it are the place of sapphires, and the clods of it are gold.
The bird hath not known the path, neither hath the eye of the vulture beheld it.
The children of the merchants have not trodden it, neither hath the lioness passed by it.
He hath stretched forth his hand to the flint, he hath overturned mountains from the roots.
In the rocks he hath cut out rivers, and his eye hath seen every precious thing.
The depths also of rivers he hath searched, and hidden things he hath brought forth to light.
[43] 'But where is wisdom to be found, and where is the place of understanding?'
[44] 'It is hid from the eyes of all living. And the fowls of the air know it not.'

This passage, with its description of mining and of earth's precious gifts, has gained the interest of eco-critic Katherine J. Dell, who dedicates a study to ascertaining what an earth-centred approach to the passage might look like. Dell says that 'although the inaccessibility of Wisdom is undeniably a major theme of the hymn, we might consider highlighting other aspects of this poem'.[45] An Earth-centred reading, suggests Dell, 'might put the stress on the fact that such treasures exist and on the fact that this poem praises the richness of Earth's gifts'.[46] 'Nowhere else in the Old Testament,' says Dell, 'is there such a fine description of the quality of Earth's treasures.'[47] She continues:

> It has often been noted that there is a rich and exotic vocabulary of precious metals and stones and of the process by which they are extracted from Earth. The chapter opens with a description of mining for silver and gold, iron and copper – this is about the human attempt to plumb the depths of Earth to its darkest corners in order to find precious metals and about human ingenuity in refining and smelting the raw materials. One might regard this as simply an example of the lengths to which human will go in their greed for gold. However, it is not simply to be seen as a description of human avarice; rather it is about the hidden riches that are to be found in the depths of Earth that only human beings can access and process.[48]

Despite Dell's efforts to draw our attention to the 'hidden riches' of the passage, I still find Job 28 highly anthropocentric. The awe expressed towards humanity's ingenuity and bravery in 'uncovering the "secrets" of Earth' dominates the passage. The miner's eye, the narrator says, *pretiosum vidit oculus eius* 'hath seen every precious thing'

[45] Katherine J. Dell, 'Plumbing the Depths of Earth: Job 28 and Deep Ecology', in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, ed. by Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 116-12 (p. 116).
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 119.
[47] *Ibid.*, p. 119.
[48] *Ibid.,* p. 118.

(Job, 28.10); humans *tempus posuit tenebris* 'set a time for darkness' and *abscondita in lucem produxit* 'hidden things he hath brought forth to light'. Humanity's ingenuity is emphasised, too, by the references to other animals that have not, like human beings, seen this part of the earth. *Semitam ignoravit avis* 'the bird hath not known the path,' the narrator says, *nec intuitus est eam oculus vulturis '*neither hath the eye of the vulture beheld it'; even the *leaena* 'lioness' has not been there. The narrator also recognises the danger of the occupation, relating how the miner searches for ore in *umbram mortis* 'the shadow of death'. One senses the narrator admires the bravery of the men who go looking for Earth's riches.[49]

The passage and its anthropocentric underpinnings serves to highlight the ecocentric nature of Riddle 83. There are images of destruction in the Job 28, but they serve rather to emphasise humanity's awesome strength and ingenuity. For example, when the narrator says that humanity *subvertit a radicibus montes* 'hath overturned mountains from the roots' he is not so much lamenting the destruction of the land as celebrating the giant-like power of men, for only giants (or God himself) could overturn a mountain. In contrast, Riddle 83 is not interested in human ingenuity or the dangers posed by mining, but in the destruction of the ore; where the writer could have chosen to depict the resourcefulness of humanity, he instead depicts the injustice humanity causes this natural resource. Riddle 83 thus resists an anthropocentric depiction of ore, offering an enigma that expresses anxiety about the removal of ore from the ground but which also avoids praise for the ingenuity of human beings, in much the same way as Riddle 26 does with its inverted colophon.

[49] An even stronger sense of this is given in the KJVB where it is said:
'He [the miner] breaks open a shaft away from people;
In places forgotten by feet
They hang far away from men;
They swing to and fro.' (Job, 28.4).

It is interesting to note here that, in Enigma 83 (*pecunia*), Symphosius describes money that was once ore in a similar way to the narrator of Job 28. Like Job 28, Symphosius speaks of the 'secret places' from which the ore was taken:

> Terra fui primo, latebris abscondita duris;
> Nunc aluid pretium flammae nomenque dederunt,
> Nec iam terra vocor, licet ex me terra paretur.[50]

There is no suggestion that an injustice has been committed; instead, the riddle focuses on naming, and on the irony that something that came from the earth is now used to *buy* earth. In contrast, Riddle 83 speaks of the secret journey the ore takes after its transformation into money, rather than of secret hidden places. In the riddle, the refined ore, now a coin, has secret power and precious skills, and ways that humans do not know. As discussed in the previous section, the coin has the power to keep secrets from human beings. The ore keeps hidden its *siðfæt* 'course' or 'journey'; humans, it is implied, do not know where the coin goes after a transaction and thus the coin can be said to pass out of human control. Although human beings usually play the dominant role in the human-nature relationship, here the ore is able to resist the mastery of humans and lay bonds on them – bonds that humans would typically lay on the natural world, such as a harness on an ox. The agency the ore gains as money suggests the natural world can in some way enact revenge on those humans who remove it from the earth and cause it harm. A riddle that depicts this kind of resistance most strongly is Riddle 27, which describes the turning of honey into mead

[50] 'At first I was earth, concealed in earth's hiding places. Now flames and a name have given me a different value, and I am no longer called earth although earth is bought with me.' Latin text and translation from *Symphosius The Aenigmata: An Introduction, Text and Commentary*, ed. and trans. by T. J. Leary (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 51 & 226.

and the effects of mead on humans, and its resistance will form the subject of my next chapter.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have shown how Riddle 83 resists two types of anthropocentrism: anthropocentrism in terms of both Christianity's focus on creation's usefulness to humans, and anthropocentrism in terms of the scholarly interpretations of the text. I disagree with Nelson that the subject's humanity is more discernible than its identity and believe that the metaphor of human usurpation reveals not social anxieties but anxieties about the use of resources. Using the violent and unjust usurpation of humans as a metaphor for the removal of ore suggests that the writer saw the removal of ore as violent and unjust. Behind the narrative of this riddle lies the message that humanity is a destructive force that can destroy the ancient roots of natural resources. The riddle thus speaks to two modern ecological concepts, namely, that humans are accountable for the destruction of the environment and that the natural world has its own unique history. But the depiction also has strong theological roots; the issue of accountability stems from the Christian narrative of the Fall and the responsibility of humanity for the suffering of the rest of creation. Humanity's use of its resource is negative in Riddle 83 and the object created by its hands is given a degree of agency that can cause humans harm. The agency of manmade objects gains even more significance in the next chapter, where I look at how Riddles 11 and 27 speak to the eco-theological principle of eco-justice and nature's resistance.

6.
‘mægene binumen’:
The Failure of Human Mastery in the Wine and Mead Riddles

In the NKJB version of the Proverbs it is said that ‘Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise’ (Proverbs, 20.1).[1] True to its Hebrew source,[2] the NKJB personifies alcoholic drinks and reminds readers of the folly of drinking to excess. This literary technique is absent in the vulgate version, which states, *luxuriosa res vinum, et tumultuosa ebrietas: quicumque his delectatur non erit sapiens*.[3] Because of the playful literary genre of which they are a part, Riddles 11 and 27 realise the value of the personification of drink, producing texts that resonate surprisingly well with the NKJB version of Proverbs 20.1. The mead of Riddle 27 is a brawler, using warrior-like strength to throw young and old to the ground, whilst the

[1] The Hebrew *shekar*, translated here as ‘strong drink’, refers to any drink made from fruit or grains and includes mead and beer. This is widely noted, but see, for example, Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 142.

[2] See Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, vol. 2 (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 2009), p. 663, and Frederick Richard Lees and Dawson Burns, *The Temperance Bible-Commentary: Giving at One View, Version, Criticism, and Exposition, in Regard to all Passages of Holy Writ Bearing on ‘Wine’ and ‘Strong Drink,’ or Illustration the Principles of the Temperance Reformation*, 2nd edn (London: S. W. Partridge, 1868), p. 133-4.

[3] ‘Wine is a luxurious thing, and drunkenness riotous: whoever is delighted therewith shall not be wise.’ Lees and Burns translate the words *luxuriosa res vinum* as ‘an immoderate (or wanton) thing is wine’ (p. 133), showing it is possible to retain the personification of wine, if not strong drink (which has been replaced by *ebrietas* ‘inebriety’), in the Hebrew text.

wine of Riddle 11 is more artful and cunning in its use of power, being able to steer its drinkers on unwise journeys. Mocker or brawler, both personified subjects have mastery over humans, a mastery that is rare among the riddles' obedient subjects. I aim to show how the two riddles diversely handle the Proverbs' concept of alcohol and how Riddle 27's depiction of the subject's mastery invites an eco-theological reading. Where Riddle 11 remains largely faithful to the depiction of wine in Proverbs, describing its allure and the dangers of its consumption, Riddle 27 develops the Proverbs' personification of strong drink into a resistance narrative, whereby the natural resource, transformed by human hands, asserts mastery over its human users through a physical assault.

Resistance is one of the key principles of eco-theology, a principle that 'claims that the earth and its components actively resist those injustices imposed by humans'.[4] The principle involves both imagining the Earth 'as a subject capable of agency'[5] and seeking out those 'Earth voices' in the Scriptures which resist the construction of 'Earth as victim'.[6] The idea that nature might resist or take revenge on humanity has been discussed by Gillian Rudd in relation to late medieval literature, albeit from an eco-critical rather than eco-theological perspective. In a study of Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, Rudd discusses a section of the text for what it says about human abuses of nature and nature's revenge. The section under discussion is Saturn's 'gleeful self-portrayal' in lines 2454-69:

> Myn is the ruyne of the hye halles,
> The fallynge of the toures and of the walles

[4] Deane-Drummond, p. 90. This is the sixth eco-theological principle put forward by the Earth Bible Team, as cited in this study's introduction.
[5] Heather Eaton, 'Ecofeminist Contributions to an Ecojustice Hermeneutics', in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, pp. 54-71 (p. 69).
[6] The Earth Bible Team, 'Guiding Ecojustice Principles', p. 52.

> Upon the mynour or the carpenter.
> (*The Knight's Tale*, 2454-69)[7]

These lines, suggests Rudd, 'could almost serve as a description of current ecological warnings'.[8] Rudd goes on to say:

> In this description of Saturn's defining powers we can read the revenge of the natural world carelessly trampled upon by humans intent only on building, fighting and courtship. In this light it makes sense that it is specifically the miner and the carpenter who are the victims of his ostensibly random actions: the miner cuts open the earth while the carpenter relies upon the cutting down of trees.[9]

Revenge is being meted out to those who take from the earth – the carpenter and miner. Rudd's discussion of this passage from Chaucer leads her to reflect that humans 'seem to want a concept of nature that includes its ability to survive wanton abuse and then, later, riposte with revenge upon the excesses of humankind'.[10] Rudd's theory resonates with the Old English riddles; in the riddle collection we find a stoically suffering natural world that, at times, contemplates the ways it can take revenge on humanity. As noted in the previous chapter, for example, Riddle 83 relates how the ore's ancestry has been destroyed by humans and how the ore, though unable to do humans *yfle* 'evil', can still lay *hæftnyd* 'captive bonds' on them (R. 83, 8b-10a).

There are some differences, however, between resistance in Rudd's late medieval text and the riddle collection. The world of the Old English riddles is very different from that of Chaucerian literature, and the themes of mastery I discuss have their roots in theological, rather than classical, concepts. The Old English riddles are always conscious of the post-lapsarian world in which they are situated; it is a fallen

[7] Rudd, p. 64.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 64.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 64.
[10] *Ibid*., p. 64.

environment that the non-human subjects inhabit. What is more, the carpenter and miner – the objects of revenge in *The Knight's Tale* – both appear in the Exeter Book riddles as enemies who fell trees and remove ore from the earth, but only the ore desires revenge. Chapter 4's comparative study of the felled tree in Riddle 53 and *The Dream of the Rood* reveals how natural materials can contribute to the moral re-shaping of humanity and how texts can draw positive affiliations between humans and the natural world as raw materials that can be 'shaped'. The relationship between humans and nature can be both positive and negative, fraught yet dynamic. An act of revenge is not the only outcome of the human-nature relationship that readers can want or anticipate; it typically only occurs when materials are misused, when humanity's re-shaped resources lead to binding financial obligations or sinful excess.

Another example of nature's revenge in medieval poetry comes again from a late medieval text, this time from a 15th century text by the German philosopher Paulus Niavis. The passage, taken from Paulus's *Iudicium Iovis* and discussed by both Richard C. Hoffman and John Aberth in their respective works on nature in the medieval world,[11] reflects on the 'perpetual conflict' of humans and nature, whereby each 'inflict[s] their respective harms upon the other':[12]

> Homines debere montes transfodere: metallifodinas perficere: agros colere studere mercature terramque offendere, scientiam abicere: plutonem inquietare. ac demum in riuulis aquarum venas metalli inquirere corpus vero eius a terra conglutiri: per vapores

[11] See Richard C. Hoffman, 'Homo et Natura, Homo in Natura: Ecological perspectives of the European Middle Ages', in *Engaging with Nature: Essays on the Natural World in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Barbara A. Hanawalt and Lisa J. Kiser (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), pp. 1-38 (pp. 12-13), and John Aberth, *An Environmental History of the Middle Ages: The Crucible of Nature* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 7-8.

[12] Aberth, pp. 7-8.

> suffocari. vino inebriari: fame subici et quod optimum sit ignorare multa preterea alia pericula hominibus esse propria.[13]

Humans and nature are 'engaged in a costly contest of mutual attrition;'[14] here, unlike in *The Knight's Tale*, we find not so much revenge but a type of cycle, governed by fate, in which each – human and nature – destroys the other. Whilst this is a much later text than the Exeter Book riddles, the ideas Paulus expresses resonate with those present in the riddle collection. We have already seen how *venas metalli* are exploited by humans in Riddle 83, but what about human attrition, attrition caused by *vapores suffocari* or, more pertinently, *vino inebriari*? It is notable that Paulus includes drinking in this description of earth and human erosion; in the eyes of Paulus, alcohol is linked directly to the cyclical conflict between humans and nature. In return for humans stabbing through mountains and striking against the earth, nature retaliates by filling humans with toxic fumes and intoxicating alcohol. The Exeter Book drinking riddles, especially Riddle 27, with its personification of mead, provide an early example of this notion. Through its depiction of personified alcohol, Riddle 27 turns the tables when it comes to the human-nature conflict so that nectar (or honey), 'helpless to withstand man's plundering and processing',[15] inflicts harm on humans when it becomes mead; in this narrative, it is humans, not natural resources, that lose in this 'costly contest' of attrition.[16]

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[13] 'Men are destined to stab through the mountains, to construct mine shafts, to till fields, to conduct trade, and to strike against the earth, to reject learning; to disturb Pluto; and even to seek out veins of metal in water courses; [man's] body [is destined] to be swallowed up by the earth, to be choked by fumes, intoxicated by wine; to be subjected to hunger and many additional dangers that it would be best not to know, which are peculiar to humankind.' Translation by Hoffman (p. 12-13). Original Latin text, cited by Hoffman (p. 29, notes), is from Paulus Niavis, *Iudicium iovis in valle amenitatis habitum ad quod mortalis homo a terra tractus propter montifodinas in monte niveo aliisque multis perfectas ac demum parricidii accusatus* (Leipzig: Martin Landsberg), n.d. [1492/95] 16 folios.

[14] Hoffman, p. 13.

[15] Williamson, *Feast of Creatures*, p. 180.

[16] Aberth, p. 8.

Artful Mastery in Riddle 11

Riddle 11 has been widely solved as 'wine', or 'beaker of wine'.[17] This riddle, quoted in full below, is both an enigma and a commentary on the intoxicating power of alcohol:

> Hrægl is min hasofag; hyrste beorhte
> reade ond scire on reafe hafu.
> Ic dysge dwelle ond dole hwette
> unrædsiþas; oþrum styre
> nyttre fore. Ic þæs nowiht wat,
> þæt heo swa gemædde, mode bestolene,
> dæde gedwolene, deoraþ mine
> won wisan gehwam. Wa him þæs þeawes
> siþþan heah bringað horda deorast,
> gif hi unrædes ær ne geswicaþ.
> (R. 11, 1a-10b)[18]

The first thing to notice in this riddle is the power the wine has over humanity. It has the ability to influence human decisions and can *dwelle* 'harm' the foolish among them (R. 11, 3a).[19] The wine does not use physical strength to master humans, but what appears to be the art of persuasion – it is said to *hwette* 'encourage' its drinkers (R. 11, 3b-4b). Its power seems to work more on the human mind and less on its limbs, making the drinker *gemædde* 'maddened', *dæde gedwolene* 'deed-perverted' and robbing him of his *mode* 'mind' (R. 11, 6a-7a). The wine also talks of its ambiguous *won wisan* 'dark ways' (R. 11, 8a), aligning itself more with devilish wiles than with a strong warrior (the warrior being associated with mead and other strong drinks).

[17] Trautmann (*BBA*, p. 173) and Wyatt (p. 71) solve the riddle as 'wine', whilst Mackie (p. 240) and Williamson (*Riddles*, p. 163) solve it as 'a beaker (or cup) of wine'. Only Dietrich and Tupper solve it as something altogether different, both opting for 'night' (Dietrich, p. 463; Tupper, *Riddles*, p. 90).

[18] 'My clothing is grey, my trappings bright; [I am] red and shiny in my robe. I harm the foolish and encourage the stupid on unwise paths, restrain others from more useful travels. I do not understand this at all, that they so maddened, robbed of mind, deed-perverted, praise each of my dark ways. Woe to them for that custom, when they bring their dearest of hoards on high, if they do not stop that unwise [practice] before.' See Williamson, Riddles, p. 165 for a discussion of various readings of unrædsiþas. Williamson glosses this word as 'unwise enterprises', but I reflect the more conventional reading of the compound *siþ* as 'journey' or 'course'.

[19] It is interesting to note that in Ælric's *Colloquy* it is said that *win nys drenc cilda ne dysigra, ac ealdra and wisra* 'wine is not a drink for the young or the foolish, but [for the] older and wiser.' (*Colloquy*, p. 47).

The wine's mastery is suggested by its ability to *styre* 'restrain' (or 'hinder') humans from useful journeys, whether they are *unrædsiþas* 'unwise' journeys or *nyttre* 'more useful' ones (R. 11, 4a-5b). The wine's ability to direct its subject on a path is significant for the way it reverses the master-servant roles of the human and riddle subject. Typically, it is a human being that directs a riddle's subject, especially, though not exclusively, in those riddles that contain themes of mastery, servitude and suffering. In Riddle 72, for example, the labouring ox narrates how it set out on a journey with the Welshman and *mearcpaþas Walas træd, moras pæðde* 'trod Welsh boundary-paths, traversed moors' (R. 72, 11a-b), whilst being bound in a harness and urged on by a man using a rod. In Riddle 52, the narrator says that the Welshwoman *weold* 'controlled' the *siþe* 'journey' of both of the bound creatures (R. 52, 6b-7a).[20] In these two riddles, a man or woman's mastery is demonstrated by his or her ability to drive the subject on a journey. In Riddle 11, the wine has been afforded a mastery usually reserved for humans, and thus irony is created by the fact that humanity, so often the master of its creations, is controlled by the subject's intoxicating power.

Riddle 11 also focuses on the wine's appearance, lending an attractiveness and allure to the drink and its 'garments'. This reflects something of the vulgate Proverbs description of wine as *luxuriosa*; but the Proverbs also offers another possible source in the following warning about wine:

> Ne intuearis vinum quando flavescit,
> Cum splenduerit in vitro color eius.
> Ingreditur blande;

[20] Some other riddles in which humans direct a subject's path include Riddle 21, where the subject's lord *hlaford*, the *weard æt steorte* 'guard at [its] tail', *wrigaþ on wonge* 'presses [it] forwards upon the field' (R. 21, 3b-5a); Riddle 32, whose subject is described as *moncynne nyt* 'useful to mankind' (R. 32, 9b), must *swiþe feran / faran ofer feldas* 'quickly travel, fare over fields' (R. 32, 7b-8a). The human *winnende wige* 'labouring warrior' of Riddle 51 *wegas tæcneþ ofer fæted gold* 'designates [the subject's] road over ornamented gold' (R. 51, 6a-7a) and the subject of Riddle 58 *wide ne fereð* 'does not travel widely' but *eorðgræf pæþeð* traverses over an earth-grave' for its *þeodne* 'master' (R. 58, 2b, 9b & 14a).

Sed in novissimo mordebit ut coluber,
Et sicut regulus venena diffundet.
Oculi tui videbunt extraneas,
Et cor tuum loquetur perversa.
(Proverbs, 23.31-33)[21]

This dramatisation of the effects of alcohol warns humans against being taken in by the attractiveness of drink, which is smooth and sparkling in appearance.[22] Indeed, the passage seems concerned with the effect of looking at the wine rather than the effect of consuming it; the act of drinking is only inferred. In Riddle 11, the narrator begins by describing the attractiveness of the wine in its cup; it is *reade ond scire* 'red and shiny' in its bright trappings (R. 11, 1a-2b). Some critics, like Williamson, interpret *reade ond scire* as a description of the jewels studding the cup, or *reade* as referring to gold.[23] However, I suggest that the opening lines are a description of the wine inside its garments (i.e. the cup), translating *on* as 'in'.[24] In Riddle 11 there is no direct reference to drinking either, only a description of the wine's attractiveness followed by

[21]'Look not upon the wine when it is yellow, when the colour thereof shineth in the glass: it goeth in pleasantly,
But in the end, it will bite like a snake, and will spread abroad poison like a basilisk.
Thy eyes shall behold strange women, and thy heart shall utter perverse things.'

[22] The translator of the Latin Vulgate interpret *flavescit* as 'yellow', but it can also be translated as 'red'. The colour is largely a matter of context; generally speaking, wine in this context is likely to be red. Discussing a reference to Proverbs 23.31 in a passage from 'Dum domus lapidea', a poem from the drinking and gambling section of the 13th Century poetry collection *Carmina Burana*, David A. Traill says, 'it is difficult to be sure exactly what color of wine the poet has in mind. Color terms are notoriously ambiguous in Latin and *flauus* seems to have covered the whole range, from yellow through tawny to a light reddish-brown.' Traill suggests we should see it as a 'rosé or tawny coloured wine', although the argument that this is because 'the biblical passage suggests the wine and glass are to be thought of as the same colour' is not persuasive. See Traill, 'Parody and Original: The Implications of the Relationship between "Dum domus lapidea" and "Dum Diane vitrea"', in *Studies in Medieval & Renaissance Culture: Breaching Boundaries* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefields, 1994), pp. 137-46 (pp. 139-40). See Neville 'Hrothgar's Horses: Feral or Thoroughbred?', *ASE*, 35 (2006), 131-57 (p. 149) for a discussion of *flavus*. The article also provides a discussion of the difficulties of deciphering Anglo-Saxon colour codes (see especially pp. 145-52). For general discussions of these difficulties see Nigel Barley, 'Old English Colour Classification: Where do Matters Stand?', *ASE*, 3 (1974), 15-28; C. P. Biggam, 'Sociolinguistic Aspects of Old English Colour Lexemes', *ASE,* 24 (1995), 51–65.

[23] Williamson says, 'This sounds like a silver cup inlaid with garnets or colored glass though technically *reade* could refer to gold' (*Riddles*, p. 164).

[24] Niles also seems to believe *reade* refers to the wine itself and not its adornment when he says 'what is described here is not just the liquid but its container as well' (p. 123).

its effects.[25] The similarities between the Proverb passage and Riddle 11 allow us to question E. G. Stanley's recent argument 'rejecting 170 years of scholarship' that we should consider the first two lines of the riddle as part of a fragment of a different riddle.[26] Stanley says that 'perhaps in riddling verse anything is possible, but the opening lines of Riddle 11 do not go well with the lines that follow'.[27] He suggests that the first two lines should be considered a 'fragmentary riddle' about 'a garment and some ornaments on that dress, or possibly about a scabbard or quiver, or ornamented quiver'.[28] However, observing the similarities between the attractiveness of wine in the Proverbs passage and Riddle 11's opening description, we can contemplate the notion that lines 1a-2b are likely describing red wine inside a silver cup, as opposed to just a bejewelled cup, and be reassured that these lines are very much part of the wine riddle.

The wine is an enigma, its appearance and behaviour there to challenge the minds of the audience; but it is also something of a teacher, giving instruction on moral behaviour and participating in the shaping of good Christian behaviour.[29] The riddle's moral message is explicitly expressed:

Wa him þæs þeawes
siþþan heah bringað horda deorast,
gif hi unrædes ær ne geswicaþ.
(R. 11, 8b-10a)[30]

[25] Peter Clemoes aptly describes the subject of Riddle 11 as 'a treacherous combination of an attractive appearance and an ability to inject into others a deadly mixture of folly (*unræd*) and enterprise (*sið*)'. See Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry*, CSASE, 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 182.
[26] E. G. Stanley, 'Exeter Book *Riddle 11*: 'Alcohol and its Effects', *Notes and Queries*, 61 (2014), 182-185 (p.184).
[27] *Ibid*., p. 183.
[28] *Ibid*., p. 183.
[29] Much like the *Rood* tree discussed in Chapter 4.
[30] 'Woe to them for that custom, when they bring their dearest of hoards on high, if they do not stop that unwise [practice] before.'

The implication here is that if humans do not cease to glut themselves on wine they will rue it when it is time for their souls (their *horda deorast*) to ascend to Heaven.[31] The use of *wa* 'woe' echoes its use in the statement *vae qui consurgitis mane ad ebrietatem sectandam et potandum usque ad vesperam ut vino aestuetis* in Isaiah 5.11.[32] The warning also brings to mind the Exeter Book poem *Vainglory*, in which the pious narrator deplores the man who is overcome by wine at the feast. Just as it is claimed that wine *dole hwette / unræd-siþas* 'encourages the foolish on unwise journeys' in Riddle 11 (R. 11, 3b-4a), so the narrator of *Vainglory* says that *win hweteð / beornes breostsefan* 'wine encourages men's hearts' (*Vgl*, 18b-19a). *Vainglory*'s drunken antagonist will be *niþer gebiged* 'forced down' – i.e. to hell – to *wunian witum fæst* 'dwell fixed in pain' (*Vgl*, 55a-56a), and this warning finds its parallel in Riddle 11's final declaration that drinkers will suffer (*wa him* 'woe to them') if they do not *geswicaþ* 'stop' their *unrædes* 'unwise [practices]' before they bring their souls 'on high'. *Vainglory*'s very Christian message is that only by *eorþan eaðmod leofað* 'living humbly here on earth' – that is, by giving up such pleasures as drinking – can the soul *astigan* 'ascend' to Heaven after death (*Vgl*, 66a-74a).[33]

Riddle 11's wine, to summarise, takes control of human minds, leading them on unwise journeys and steering them away from more useful paths. The riddle-writer focuses largely on the appearance of the wine, presenting the drink as an alluring object whose intoxicating power has negative implications for overindulgent humans. There is irony to be found in the way the wine has the ability to control its human

[31] Williamson offers the same interpretation of these lines, seeing the inference as the 'central irony' of the riddle. 'The jewelled cup,' Williamson says, 'is an earthly treasure often raised high in the drinking. The *horde deorast* is a heavenly treasured raised high at the Last Judgment' (*Riddles*, p. 166). See also Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought*, p. 183, for a variety of possible interpretations of *horda deorast*.

[32] 'Woe to you that rise up early in the morning to follow drunkenness, and to drink in the evening, to be inflamed with wine.'

[33] For a comprehensive discuss of drink in Anglo-Saxon culture see Magennis, *Anglo-Saxon Appetites: Food and Drink and their Consumption in Old English and Related Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts, 1999).

consumers, since it is usually the human being that has control over a riddle subject. The riddle offers us an alternative to human mastery in the collection, but its concerns are not wholly ecological. The riddle is as much, if not more, interested in expressing the importance of human abstinence as it is in granting a riddle subject agency. What is more, there is no connection made between the riddle subject, wine, and the natural world from which it comes. With this in mind, let us turn to Riddle 27, whose description of mead speaks far more readily to eco-theological principles.

Physical Mastery in Riddle 27

Riddle 27 has been widely solved as mead.[34] It depicts honey being brought into the hive by bees[35] and the honey being turned into mead:

> Ic eom weorð werum, wide funden,
> brungen of bearwum ond of burghleoþum,
> of denum ond of dunum. Dæges mec wægun
> feþre on lifte, feredon mid liste
> under hrofes hleo. Hæleð mec siþþan
> baþedan in bydene. Nu ic eom bindere
> and swingere; sona weorpe
> esne to eorþan, hwilum ealdne ceorl.
> Sona þæt onfindeð, se þe mec fehð ongean
> ond wið mægenþisan minre genæsteð,
> þæt he hrycge sceal hrusan secan
> gif he unrædes ær ne geswiceð.
> Strengo bistolen, strong on spræce,
> mægene binumen– nah his modes geweald,
> fota ne folma. Frige hwæt ic hatte
> ðe on eorþan swa esnas binde
> dole æfter dyntum be dæges leohte.
> (R. 27, 1a-17b)[36]

[34] The solution 'mead' has been accepted by all editors, although it was first solved as 'whip' by Dietrich (p. 467).

[35] The hive is described somewhat ambiguously as *hrofes hleo* 'roof's protection'. For a discussion of the structure of beehives see Banham and Faith, pp. 135-36.

[36] 'I am valuable to men, widely found, brought from groves and from mountain-slopes, valleys and hills. By day feathers carry me into the air, ferry me with skill under the roof's protection. Man then bathed me in a barrel. Now I am binder and scourger; I immediately throw the servile youth to the earth, sometimes an elderly churl. The one who fights against me and who contends against my power soon discovers that he must

The narrator describes how it is brought from various places by *feþre* 'wings', which we might assume refers to the bees that carry the nectar.[37] The subject is then *baþedan in bydene* 'bathed in a barrel', which refers to the process of making mead.[38] The statement that the subject in its secondary state, honey, is valuable to men is satisfyingly explained by Williamson, who cites the *Laws* of Alfred in which 'the bee thief is punished as severely as the horse thief and the stealer of gold'.[39]

Like the majority of the other riddles I have explored thus far, Riddle 27 begins by relating the subject's origins. We learn that it is *wide funden* 'widely found' in *bearwum* 'groves' and on *burg-hleoþum* 'mountain slopes', in *denum* 'valleys' and on *dunum* 'hills' (R. 27, 1b-3a). Once again, we are introduced to the subject as a natural resource that has been taken by, or delivered into, the hands of humans. It is then, like the antler, tree and animal hide, transformed into something new, in this case an intoxicating drink. However, instead of entering a life of servitude and suffering after transformation, as we have come to expect from this type of riddle, the mead becomes the master of humanity, exercising power over its human creator. This narrative, seen by Williamson as the poem's central paradox,[40] distinguishes the riddle's inversion of power-roles from that depicted in Riddle 11; in Riddle 11, there is no mention of the wine's origins, its beginnings as a natural resource before it is used by humans, and bonds are not used to signify enslavement or mastery. Riddle 11 inverts the typical power roles between humans and non-humans but, unlike Riddle 27, it does not

seek the earth on his back, if he does not abandon earlier folly. Robbed of strength, strong in speech, deprived of power, he does not have possession of his mind, feet or hands. Find what I am called, who thus bind youths to the earth, foolish ones after my blows [made] by the light of day.'

[37] Murphy translates the words *feþre on lifte* as a kenning for bees: 'feathers of the air' (p. 164).

[38] Ann Hagen, *Anglo-Saxon Food and Drink: Production, Processing, Distribution and Consumption* (Hockwold cum Wilton, Norfolk: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2006), p. 226.

[39] Williamson, *Riddles*, p. 216. For the value of bees and honey to the Anglo-Saxons see also Banham and Faith, pp. 104-05, and Hagen, p. 147.

[40] Williamson, *Feast of Creatures*, p. 180.

present us with an ecologically aware resistance narrative in which the natural resource gains mastery over humans.

In Riddle 27, the mead is active, in much the same way as it is in the NKJB version of Proverb 20.1, where it described as a 'brawler'.[41] Significantly, humans do not lose mastery of themselves in the riddle so much as the mead – or, rather, the transformed honey – gains mastery over them. It is useful to compare the mead's agency in the human's drunken downfall to the description of the drinker in *Fortunes of Men*. In this Exeter Book poem, the narrator relates the fate of the drinker thus:

> Sum sceal on beore þurh byreles hond
> meodugal mæcga. Þonne he gemet ne con
> gemearcian his muþe mode sine,
> ac sceal ful earmlice ealdre linnan,
> dreogan dryhtenbealo dreamum biscyred,
> ond hine to sylfcwale secgas nemnað,
> mænað mid muþe meodugales gedrinc.
> (*FoM*, 51a-57b)[42]

The man, the narrator says, is unable to control himself; he does not know *gemet* 'self-restraint' (or 'moderation') and his mind cannot control his mouth. The man is called a *sylfcwale* 'suicide' or, literally, 'self-kill' – his miserable end has been brought about by himself. The focus is on personal self-control, rather than on an outside force that robs the man of control.

For Neville, the outside force of Riddle 27 is comparable to an invading monster:

[41] For this reason, I think Williamson is wrong to see Riddle 27's subject as 'lady "mead"', as a seductress like the subject of Riddle 11. See Williamson, *Feast of Creatures*, p. 169. The actions are hardly those of a lady.
[42] 'One, through the cupbearer's hand at beer [drinking], shall become a man excited by mead. Then he will not know how to mark a limit to his mouth with his own mind, but, shorn of joy, he shall depart from life most miserably, suffer extreme wretchedness, and men will call him a 'suicide', allude with their mouths to the drinking of a man excited by mead.' Williamson also notes the thematic similarity of Riddle 27 *with The Fortunes of Men* (*Riddles*, p. 217).

> this 'monster' appears similar to Grendel, who before encountering Beowulf had never lost a wrestling match and was known for depriving men of their feet and hands, among other things. The subject of the riddle is not a monster, of course, but mead, which causes men to lose control of themselves.[43]

In Riddle 27, this invading 'monstrous' force, so often depicted in Anglo-Saxon literature as a force beyond human control, a threat to human society,[44] is brought about by humans themselves, is let into the hall as it were, through the transformation and consumption of human resources. The contest ends up being not a contest between human and monster, but between human and nature. For Neville, this is a case of letting the dangerous natural world in:

> What is important…is the way in which the poet first describes the object in terms of the labour expended on it and its value to human beings. As a result, the audience expects some kind of artefact, a safely 'denatured' and passive object, like those in Riddles 26, 53 and 88. Having led the audience thus far, however, the poet then destabilises the supposedly safe area inside the human circle of light by maintaining that the object still retains the dangerous power of the natural world.[45]

This aspect of the natural world, nectar (or honey), however, was not dangerous in the first place, like the other aspects of the natural world that caused Anglo-Saxons harm; it is only when transformed that nature becomes dangerous here.[46] One could say the author of Riddle 27 uses what is monstrous to depict something akin to the 'costly

[43] Neville, *Representations*, p. 100.
[44] See Neville, *Representations*, p. 72, and 'Monsters and Criminals: Defining Humanity in Old English Poetry', in *Monsters and the Monstrous in Medieval Northwest*, Karin E. Olsen and L. A. J. R. Houwen (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), pp. 103-22 (p. 112).
[45] Neville, *Representations*, p. 201.
[46] Bees, as opposed to nectar, are perhaps a better example of harmful nature, as depicted in Riddle 17. For a discussion of Riddle 17 as a beehive see Marijane Osborn, '"Skep" (Beinenkorb, *beoleap) as a Culture-Specific Solution to Exeter Book Riddle 17', *ANQ*, 18 (2005), 8-18.

contest of mutual attrition' between humans and nature; nectar, or honey, taken by human beings from its natural environment and passively submitting to processing by human hands, now has the power to cause what Hoffman calls 'human erosion'.[47] Natural materials, made into objects, can 'shape' human beings, as we saw in *Rood*, but they can also degrade or 'erode' them, just as humans can shape or erode nature.

The powerful mead 'destabilises the supposed safe area' of the hall, whilst most riddle subjects tend to lose their agency when they enter a human dwelling.[48] Where the animal subjects of Riddle 52 are *fergan / under hrof sales* 'ferried under hall's roof' (R. 52, 1b-2a) to endure a painful servitude, the subject of Riddle 27, *feredon mid liste / under hrofes hleo* 'ferried with skill under the roof's protection' (R. 27, 4b-5a), exercises power and control. Riddle 52's *ræpingas* 'enslaved things' are *gefeterade fæste togædre* 'fettered fast together' when they are taken into the hall (R. 52, 4a-b) and a *wonfah Wale* 'dark-haired Welsh woman' is said to be *getenge* 'oppressing' one of the two; but in Riddle 27 it is the riddle-subject, not a human, who is the *bindere / and swingere* 'binder and scourger' (R. 27, 6b-7a).

To grant the subject the title of 'binder' is to grant it great power and autonomy. While it is most commonly humans who do the binding in the Exeter Book riddles – Riddle 26's treated animal hide, for example, is bound with wires (R. 26, 14b) and the ox of Riddle 72 is *bunden under beame* 'bound under beam' (R. 72, 12a) – it is humans that are bound in this narrative. Similarly, by being a 'scourger', the mead is inflicting pain or wounds onto humans that humans would normally inflict on the riddle's subject, like the *wunda* 'wounds' of the felled tree (R. 53, 7a) and ore (R. 83, 10b) or the *beages / benne* 'ring's wounds' in Riddle 59 (R. 59, 11b-12a). The mead makes humans lose

[47] Hoffman, p. 13.
[48] That drink can also bring about the opposite of destabilisation in the hall see Hugh Magennis, 'The *Beowulf* Poet and his *druncne dryhtguman*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 86 (1985), 159-64.

possession of their *modes* ‘mind’ too, but the overall emphasis in Riddle 27 is placed on the loss of physical control and strength: the act of falling to the earth is mentioned twice. Riddle 11, in contrast, focuses on the way alcohol leads humans astray rather than on its effects on the body.

It is important to note that humans are not passive sufferers in Riddle 27: a drinker *fehð ongean* ‘fights against’ the riddle’s subject and *genæsteð* ‘contends’ with its power (R. 27, 9b-10b).[49] Yet, for all their struggling, humans are overcome by the mead and end up lying supine; a drinker *sona þæt onfindeð* ‘soon finds that’ he *hrycge sceal hrusan secan* ‘must seek the earth on his back’ (R. 27, 11a-b). Where the animal hide in Riddle 26 is *worulstrenga binom* ‘deprived of physical strength’ (R. 26, 2a), in an ironic twist, the human is *strengo bistolen* ‘robbed of strength’ by the transformed nectar (R. 27, 13a). The fact that humans falls supine in this way should not be overlooked. Old Testament theology commands that humans must hold themselves upright; not to do so would be to lower oneself, physically and morally, to the level of beasts.[50] The man who contends with the strength of mead loses both loftiness and strength and ends up supine *on eorþan* ‘on the earth’ (R. 27, 8a), unable to stand

[49] The Riddle does use the conditional *gif* here, but the narrator recognises that the man might *try* to fight, rather than passively suffer the mead’s power.

[50] See, for example, Ambrose, *Hexameron*, Day VI, part 3: *sed uis ad usum hominis deriuare quae genita sunt? noli ueritatem unicuique generi naturae propriae denegare, et multo magis ea ad gratiam aptabis humanam, primum quia omnia genera pecorum, bestiarum ac piscium in aluum natura prostrauit, ut alia uentre repant, alia quae pedibus sustinentur demersa magis quadripedi corporis gressu et uelut adfixa terris uideas esse quam libera, siquidem, cum erigendi se non habeant facultatem, de terra uictum requirunt et uentris, in quem deflectuntur, solas sequuntur uoluptates. caue, o homo, pecorum more curuari, caue in aluum te non tam corpore quam cupiditate deflectas. respice corporis tui formam et speciem congruentem celsi uigoris adsume, sine sola animalia prona pascantur.* ‘In the first place, nature has been designed that every species of cattle, beast, and fish has its belly extended, so that some crawl on their stomachs. You may observe even those animals that need the support of the legs are, by reason of their four-legged motion, part and parcel of the earth and thus lack freedom of action. They have, in fact, no ability to stand erect. They therefore seek their sustenance in the earth, solely pursuing the pleasures of the stomach towards which they incline. Take care not to be bent over like cattle. See that you do not incline – not so much physically as they do, but morally. Have regard for the conformation of your body and assume in accordance with it the appearance of loftiness and strength. Leave to animals the sole privilege of feeding in a prone position.’ Latin text from *Sancti Ambrosii Opera*, pp. 209-10. Translation from Savage, *Hexameron*, p.233.

erect; he also lacks 'freedom of action', having no *geweald* 'possession' of his *fota ne folma* 'feet or hands' (R. 27, 14b-15a). Yet he is not to be pitied like the ox of Riddle 72, which passively suffers in silence; the drunken man is *dole* 'foolish', fights back, is *strong on spræce* 'strong in speech' (R. 27, 17a, 9b & 13b). Here, to fight back is not admirable; the drinker is not fighting temptation nor is he, contrary to Neville's suggestion that the mead is a monster, valiantly fighting off an invading foe. Being 'strong in speech' is not estimable either; it carries negative connotations, as it does in *Vainglory*, where the drunken man *breodað and bælceð* 'shouts and boasts' (*Vgl*, 28a).

Riddle 27 also reflects on other depictions of power and control in the Exeter Book collection to supply the text with additional meaning; the subject's mastery is demonstrated through the use of thematic associations and ironic inversions. It is useful here to contrast the actions and experiences of the transformed nectar with the treatment of the animal hide in Riddle 26. I have already noted how both the hide and the drunken man are 'robbed of strength', but there are other similarities to be noted. In Riddle 26, the hide is *dyfde on wætre* 'dipped in water' (R. 26, 3a) and in Riddle 27 the subject is *baþedan in bydene* 'bathed in a barrel' (R. 27, 6a). Both the Bible and the mead are said to be useful to humans; the Bible is *niþum to nytte* 'useful to men' (R. 26, 27a), whilst the subject of Riddle 27 is *weorð werum* 'valuable to men' (R. 27, 1a). However, it is clear that, though both objects are desirable, one is useful and the other is harmful. Where the Bible brings its reader *freonda þy ma* 'more friends', and makes them, among other things, *þy gesundran ond þy sigefæstran* 'more prosperous and more victorious' and *ferþe þy frodran* 'wiser in mind' (R. 26, 19a-21a), the mead drinker is *strengo bi-stolen* 'robbed of strength' and *mægene bi-numen* 'deprived of power' (R. 27, 13a-14a). Where the Bible has the power to give, the mead has the

power to deprive. It seems significant that Riddle 27 should declare its subject 'valuable' at the beginning of the text and then call its value into question by the end of it, whilst Riddle 26 calls the Bible 'useful' at the end of the riddle, when its uses have already been demonstrated. The purpose of Riddle 27's use of 'valuable' seems to be to create irony; the natural product, honey, is profitable to humans, bringing economic gain, but it is far from 'valuable' after its transformation into intoxicating mead. The Bible, in contrast, brings humans a different sort of gain, bringing them, among other things, *freonda þy ma* 'more friends' and happiness, boldness and wisdom (R. 26, 20a-21a). Where alcohol negatively whets human hearts, the Bible's whetting of human hearts is seen as purely positive.[51] It is perhaps no coincidence that the two riddles, 26 and 27, are found alongside each other in the manuscript.

What Riddle 27 does is create irony; where it is normally humans who are controlling and inflicting injury on the things they use, in Riddle 27, the thing he uses has mastery over him and can cause him harm. It is this irony that seems to be missing from Aldhelm's drinking riddles, the sense that the tables are being turned on humanity. We might compare the themes of Riddle 27 with Aldhelm's Riddle 78, in order to add to our understanding of Riddle 27's ecological message. Aldhelm's Riddle 78 has the solution *cupa vinaria* 'wine-cask' and reads:

> En, plures debrians impend pocula Bacchi,
> Vinitor expressit quæ flavescentibus uvis
> Pampinus et viridi genuit de palmite botris,
> Nectare cauponis complens ex vite tabernam.
> Sic mea turgescunt ad plenum wiscera musto,
> Et tamen inflatum non vexat crapula corpus,
> Quamvis hoc nectar centenis hauserit urnis.
> Proles sum terræ glescens in saltibus altis;

[51] Men will be *heortum þy hwætran* 'sharper in [their] hearts' (R. 26, 20a). For negative whetting see Riddle 11, line 3b, and *Vainglory*, line 18b.

Materiam cuneis findit sed cultor agrestis
Pinos evertens altas et robora ferro.[52]

There are two references to inebriation in this riddle about a wine-cask; the first is in line 1, where the subject relates how it gets many men drunk, and the second reference is in lines 5-7, where the subject considers the irony of its being swollen with wine yet not feeling the effects of the alcohol itself. Yet, despite the wine-cask's ability to inebriate humans, there is no sense of resistance or revenge in this riddle.[53]

Aldhelm's Riddle 78, called one of the more 'mundane' riddles in the *Enigmata*,[54] is one of the few enigmas to describe in some detail the subject's origins. It contains an interesting allusion to the wine cask's place of origin on uplands, where it is said the husbandman cuts wood. It also mentions the origins of the wine, which is said to grow on vines and be pressed by the vinter. Yet there is no narrative here, no set of sequential events; in the Exeter Book Riddle 27, in contrast, the subject is brought in from its place of origin, then bathed in a barrel, and is then a master of

[52] 'Many the men that I inebriate
By doling out full cups of heady wine
From golden clusters by the vinter pressed,
Born of the vine with green and tender shoots,
To stock with nectar every wayside inn.
Thus swelling and filled to bursting with new wine,
I feel intoxication not a whit,
Though from a hundred jars the must is poured.
The offspring of the earth am I, and grow
On lofty uplands; there the husbandman
Splits with his wedge the timber, laying low
Tall pines and towering oak-trees with the axe.' Latin text and translation are from Pitman, pp. 46-47.

[53] For another example of Aldhelm's use of the power of drink over humans see Enigma 80 ('glass cup'), especially lines 5-8:

Sed mentes muto, dum labris oscula trado
Dulcia compressis impendens basia buccis,
Atque pedum pressum titubantes sterno ruina.

'But I befool their [i.e. the drinkers'] minds, the while I lay
Sweet kisses on their lips that press me close,
And urge their tottering footsteps to a fall.' (Pitman, pp. 48-49).

This riddle, however, bears closer similarities to Exeter Book Riddle 63, with its depiction of a drinking vessel as a seductor, a similarity which has been also been noted by Dietrich (p. 478).

[54] Williamson, *Riddles*, p. 24.

humans (*nu ic eom…* 'now I am…'); in Riddle 27 we get a strong sense of the subject gaining agency when it is transformed by humans into something potent. It is worth noting here that men in Aldhelm's riddle are inebriated by the intoxicating power of the wine the subject doles out, but they are also depicted as destructive woodcutters with the control to cut down *pinos evertens altas et robora ferro* 'tall pines and towering oak-trees'. The end of the riddle preserves humanity's status as master over, and user of, earth's resources; humanity is depicted as the feller rather than the felled. It is possible that the writer of Riddle 27 wished to reverse this image of the tree-cutter by making the human the one that is thrown to the ground.

It is typical of a number of Exeter Book riddles that the natural resource is transformed into something new after being bound, scourged or felled by an aggressive force. Like the tree in Riddle 53 and *Rood*, human beings are 'felled' by aggressive force that binds and scourges in Riddle 27; but drinkers, unlike human creations, do not experience a positive transformation. Through the riddle's inversion of power roles, the natural resource attains mastery as a warrior-like aggressor, whilst the drinker is an entity that, like the riddles' non-human subjects, is physically controlled and afflicted. 'A creature that is not man takes on the cloak of man', as Williamson says,[55] but a man can also take on the cloak, or at least some of the characteristics, of a non-human creature. The only difference is that humans have the ability (albeit limited when inebriated with alcohol) to struggle against the power that attempts to overwhelm them. The eco-critical idea of 'costly mutual attrition' takes on religious significance here; erosion can affect not just the human body through the

[55] Williamson, *Riddles,* p. 26.

intake of toxic (or *intoxicating*) drink, but can affect the spirit too, causing both body and soul to *eal forweornast* 'completely decay' (*S & B II*, 18b).[56]

In his *Liber regulae pastoralis*, Pope Gregory I records an example of when literal bonds and scourging bring about a positive transformation in human beings.[57] In his work about the clergyman's various duties, Gregory, translated into the Anglo-Saxon, relates that a description of those *halgan men geðafedon on ðisse worlde* 'holy men [who] endured in this world', who suffered many *bindas* 'bonds' and *swyngean* 'strokes', was used by St. Paul as a *liðelican bisnunga* 'gentle example' to *gespone* 'persuade' the *medwiisan* 'foolish' to *maran angienne* 'greater enterprises'.[58] In Riddle 27, the *dole* 'foolish' are not made better by bonds and physical assaults, but are merely left with a bad hangover. As part of a collection of texts found in a monastery, this riddle could similarly be used as a 'gentle example' to persuade its readers towards moderation. The transformed natural material does not improve a human's spiritual condition, as the tree does in *Rood*, but the contemplation of the degradation of the spirit by intoxication, dramatized in Riddle 27 and elucidated in Riddle 11, has the same didactic potential.

Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to show how Riddle 11 and 27 resonate with the Proverbs' personification of alcohol and, more importantly, how Riddle 27's depiction of the mead's agency and mastery of humans, unlike Riddle 11's description of wine, invites

[56] As Paulus Niavis says, *corpus vero eius a terra conglutiri: per vapores suffocari. vino inebriari* '[man's] body [is destined] to be swallowed up by the earth, to be choked by fumes, intoxicated by wine'.
[57] A Latin version of *Liber regulae pastoralis* was procured by Bishop Leofric for Exeter church. See Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 139-40.
[58] Henry Sweet, ed. and trans., *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care: with an English Translation, the Latin Text, Notes, and an Introduction*, Vol. 1 (London: Early English Text Society, 1871), p. 205. Translations are my own.

an eco-theological reading. Drawing on the eco-theological principle of resistance, which claims that the earth has agency and can resist the wrongs caused it by humans, I have shown how Riddle 27 presents us with its own resistance narrative. The riddle depicts a natural resource, nectar, being transformed into mead, and having the power to throw both young and old to the ground. Through a process of 'mutual attrition', described by Paulus Niavis in a later medieval text, humans can degrade and erode the natural world, but the natural world can also degrade and erode humans.

Unlike the toiling ox of Riddle 72 or the passive animal hide of Riddle 26, Riddle 27's natural resource is not the victim of injustices caused by humans; in an ironic twist, it is humans who are robbed of strength, felled, bound and scourged. The riddle's depiction of nature's agency invites interesting comparisons with Aldhelm's Riddle 78; where Aldhelm preserves humanity's status as master of earth's resources with the final image of a carpenter felling a tree, Riddle 27 reverses the image so that it is humans who are felled by one of earth's resources. Unlike the felled tree we have come to understand in Chapter 3, however, the overpowered drinker does not undergo a positive transformation; he is not, like the 'un-shaped' dreamer of *The Dream of the Rood*, transformed by a natural entity into something new and better.

Riddle 27 offers an example of when humans do not have control over the natural world; in the final chapter, I move on to think about how human knowledge, typically seen as a tool with which humanity can master a large, overwhelming cosmos, is challenged in the Exeter Book riddle collection through the influence of Old Testament wisdom.

7.
‘swa ne wenaþ men’:
The Limits of Wisdom in Riddle 84 and the Storm Riddles

‘…knowing is the quintessential anthropocentric act of appropriation…’[1]

Thus far in this study I have explored themes of transformation, creation, accountability and control, looking at the physical nature of objects and their environment and how the natural world is employed by humans. In this final chapter, I discuss the riddle collection’s programme of resistance to anthropocentrism by exploring the depiction of human wisdom and its failure in the face of the vastness and complexity of creation. Previous studies of wisdom in Old English literature have focused on categorising, defining and understanding the role and nature of wisdom poetry,[2] whilst the riddles have received notably less attention for what they have to say about the subject.[3] Here,

[1] Fromm, p. 4.

[2] See Morton W. Bloomfield and Charles W. Dunn, *The Role of the Poet in Early Societies* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989), especially chapters 7 and 8, ‘The Notion of Wisdom’ and ‘Wisdom Genres and Types of Literature’.

[3] Two notable collections of essays on the topic of wisdom include *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honor of Morton W. Bloomfield*, ed. by Larry Dean Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1982) and *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill*, ed. by Charles D. Wright, Frederick M. Biggs, and Thomas N. Hall (Toronto: Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006). The riddles are notably absent from these collections. Perhaps the most in-depth study of wisdom in the riddles can be found in Chapter 5 of Elaine T. Hansen’s *The Solomon Complex: Reading Wisdom in Old English Poetry* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1988).

in what is perhaps a much-needed contribution to our understanding of the relationship between ecology and wisdom in the riddles, I turn to the representation of the natural world in wisdom literature and to the understanding that humanity's exhibition of its own wisdom or intelligence is in itself an act of anthropocentrism. It has been argued that, according to Anglo-Saxon thinking, the employment of human intelligence was perceived as a demonstration of mastery over the natural world, and, furthermore, that early medieval riddles endorse this concept.[4] Drawing on the Old Testament's The Book of Job, with its eco-centric proclivities, I argue that Riddles 1, 2, 3 and 84 challenge humanity's belief in the supremacy of its wisdom and endorse a more ecological view of wisdom and knowledge.[5]

The Earth Bible Team has done much to improve our understanding of the non-human perspective in the Biblical wisdom tradition, with a volume dedicated to an ecological approach to these texts.[6] The questions the Team set out to answer include 'where is the *voice* of the Earth and the Earth community [in wisdom literature]'? and 'is the voice of Earth silenced, suppressed and ultimately dominated by the wise who have an anthropocentric view of the world?'[7] Certain wisdom texts, say Habel et al, offer us a typically anthropocentric view of the world. For example, in the Proverbs, especially Proverbs 10-21, 'Human beings – not Earth, creation, or Earth community – are central'.[8] The focus, it is argued, is on 'social relations, human behaviour and

[4] See Neville, *Representations*, Chapter 6. See especially pp. 193 and 199.
[5] Possible Biblical influences on the storm riddles have been noted by Kennedy (p. 145), including Psalm 135.7 and Jeremiah 10.13, but The Book of Job is not mentioned.
[6] See vol. 3 of the Earth Bible series, *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, ed. by Habel and Wurst.
[7] The Earth Bible Team, 'Where is the Voice of the Earth in Wisdom Literature', in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, pp. 23-34 (p. 23).
[8] *Ibid*., p. 24.

communal justice' and the few references to domestic animals 'do not highlight the wonders of creation but the instrumental value of these animals for humans'.[9]

However, drawing on their six ecojustice principles, Habel et al argue that there *are* Biblical wisdom texts that offer earth's perspective, including The Book of Job, Ecclesiastes and The Song of Songs. Job, the focus of this present chapter, depicts creatures that 'defy human domination'[10] and depicts a world that has 'intrinsic worth apart from any human valuation'.[11] But the text also challenges the nature of human wisdom itself and 'place[s] in question all thoughts of humans as the centre of creation'.[12] God asks Job a plenitude of questions when He appears out of the whirlwind at the end of The Book of Job (38-41) and the main purpose of His questioning is to expose humanity's ignorance of the created world and to condemn its so-called wisdom – wisdom which is actually *sermonibus imperitis* (Job, 38.2).[13] Through the lengthy interrogation, God challenges Job's anthropocentric worldview, telling Job of creatures and natural forces that are not part of humanity's narrow view of creation, of wild beasts and ancient monsters that are not, nor could ever be, harnessed by humans. Job is also enlightened with the knowledge that a relationship exists between God and other created things that humanity is not a part of and does not have sufficient wisdom to imagine. The Creator's rebuke leads Job to humbly admit, *ideo insipienter locutus sum, et quae ultra modum excederent scientiam meam* (Job, 42.3).[14]

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[9] *Ibid*., p. 24.
[10] Habel, 'Earth First: Inverse Cosmology in Job', in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, pp. 65-77 (pp. 75-6).
[11] Dale Patrick, 'Divine Creative Power and the Decentering of Creation: The Subtext of the Lord's Address to Job', in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, pp. 103-15 (p. 111).
[12] Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, The Old Testament Library, vol. 2, trans. by Leo G. Perdue (Louisville, KT: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. 203.
[13] 'sentences in unskilful words'. The NKJB has 'words without knowledge', which is more accurate.
[14] 'I have spoken unwisely, and things that above measure exceeded my knowledge.'

I suggest the issues that arise in The Book of Job influence the depictions of forces or elements in the Exeter Book riddles, namely the water of Riddle 84 and the storm of Riddles 1, 2 and 3. These riddles contain beast-like creatures that humans cannot hope to harness or fully know, and which are reminiscent of Job's behemoth or leviathan. Job's influence can also be found in the questions posed in the storm riddles, which echo the sarcastic and scornful nature of God's interrogation. God's questions are largely rhetorical and expose the limits of wisdom as much as they ask for answers, and I suggest this is what the storm riddles achieve in their depictions of mysterious forces.

The Nature of Wisdom

According to James Hall Pitman, editor and translator of Aldhelm's *Enigmata*, 'from all time the ability to solve riddles has been looked upon among simple folk as an indication of wisdom'.[15] Yet wisdom, as it is widely perceived, has a 'preoccupation with questions rather than answers',[16] with contemplation rather than certainty. Such a characteristic seems to conflict with the nature of most riddles (I exclude the Exeter Book riddles here, for reasons which will become clear), which are more concerned with solutions than with advancing further questions. Wisdom today is typically defined as the 'capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct';[17] the ability to solve riddles, we might think, is more of a sign of intelligence, the 'capacity to understand',[18] than wisdom. What, we must ask, is it that riddles are challenging

[15] Pitman, p. i.
[16] Robert J. Sternberg, 'Understanding Wisdom', in *Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development*, ed. by Robert J. Sternberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 1-12 (p. 7).
[17] "Wisdom, n." OED 2nd ed. 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press. April 2015 http://dictionary.oed.com/
[18] "Intelligence, n." OED 3rd ed. 2010. OED Online. Oxford University Press. April 2015 <http://dictionary.oed.com/>

readers to demonstrate in their ability to solve them? Do we call it wisdom, knowledge or intelligence, or do we regard these as one and the same thing in Anglo-Saxon and theological contexts?

The problem of defining wisdom is an ongoing one, especially in the field of theology.[19] Says Joel A. A. Ajayi, 'the only consensus reached has been the common understanding that Old Testament wisdom eludes definition because of its multifaceted or ambiguous nature'.[20] One of the main problems for defining Biblical wisdom is, according Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Kevin Rathunde, the fact that 'in many texts…wisdom fails to be differentiated from knowledge; the two terms appear to be synonymous'.[21] Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde offer Ecclesiastes 1.18 as an example, where it is said, 'for in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow'. Thus, in The Book of Job, when God criticises Elihu for speaking 'words without knowledge' he could also mean 'words without wisdom'.

We encounter the same lack of distinction in Old English literature, where terms for wisdom and knowledge are used interchangeably. To quote Shippey, 'Anglo-Saxon wisdom, it seems, is neither knowledge nor faith nor morality, but an uneasy mixture of all these and more'.[22] In Old English literature, wisdom can come from experience, from having *wintra dæl in woruldrice* 'a deal of winters in this world' (*Wan*, 65a), but it can also come from knowledge gathered from books and scholarship. For example, the narrator of *Vainglory* relates how he was told *sundorwundra fela* 'many diverse wonders' by someone *frod* 'wise'/'old' and *snottor* 'clever'/'sagacious' (*Vgl*, 1a-2b) who

[19] Joel A. A. Ajayi offers a particularly comprehensive overview of this area of research in chapter three of *A Biblical Theology of Gerassapience* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010). See especially pp. 49-52.
[20] *Ibid*., p. 49
[21] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Kevin Rathunde, 'The Psychology of Wisdom: An Evolutionary Interpretation', in *Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development*, ed. by Robert J. Sternberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 25-51 (p. 42).
[22] T. A. Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* (London: D. S. Brewer, 1976), p. 4.

is also a *beorn boca gleaw* 'man skilled with books' (*Vgl*, 4a). Human beings can be described by the extent to which they are *gleaw* or *snottor*, as well as by the extent to which they are *frod* or *wis*. Old English wisdom poems 'valorise the acquisition of certain types of knowledge',[23] and this knowledge includes both morality and the ways and workings of the world.[24] In his introduction to his collection of Old English wisdom poems, Shippey differentiates 'material and moral wisdom', and I find this a helpful way to define these two categories of knowledge.[25] The wisdom I am discussing in this chapter is not so much moral wisdom as material wisdom, to borrow Shippey's phrase – a wisdom derived from the knowledge humans have about the universe and the created world. In The Book of Job 38-42, God is showing Job how little he knows about the ways of the non-human world, not criticising his moral judgment, and this is a distinction I apply to the riddles discussed in this chapter.

Wisdom and Anthropocentrism

The genre of wisdom has, for a long time, been regarded as highly anthropocentric. Interpreters of the Biblical wisdom narratives regard wisdom as 'uniquely anthropocentric', since it deals with the 'human quest to secure wholeness and prosperity'.[26] Eco-theologian Julia Dell offers a summary of this typical approach, saying, 'wisdom has been regarded as very much "life from the human side" in contrast to divine revelation. It has a pragmatism and realism that is firmly grounded in concern

[23] Antonina Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry* (New York: Rodolpi, 2002), p. 62.
[24] To give an example, *Precepts* is a wisdom poem largely about morality in which a person described as a *frod fæder* 'wise father', a *freobearn lærde* 'educated freeborn' and a *modsnottor mon* 'knowledgeable-minded man' gives advice to his son on how to *do a þætte duge* 'do that which is good' (Precepts, 1a-4a), whilst *The Fortunes of Men* and *Maxims I* and *II* are about the ways and workings of the world, about everything that God *monnum scrifeð* 'allots for men' (*FoM*, 95-96).
[25] Shippey, p. 10.
[26] William P. Brown, *Wisdom's Wonder: Character, Creation, and Crisis in the Bible's Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eardmans, 2014), p. 3.

for human beings and their relationships.'[27] Yet wisdom literature need not always be interpreted as anthropocentric, as it often draws from the 'realm of creation for its didactic insights'.[28]

Wisdom literature has been called a 'vital ingredient'[29] in the recovery of an ecological appreciation of theology, yet, surprisingly, 'wisdom literature has only slowly been brought into the environmental debate'.[30] The reason for its absence, Dell says, is largely an exclusive interest in, or focus on, the Genesis narrative and its master-slave relationship between humans and nature in eco-theological studies.[31] 'However,' says Dell, 'the wisdom tradition stands apart as having its own worldview regarding God as creator, a rich tradition of observation of the natural world and of the interaction of human beings with both'.[32] Dell is one of the leading eco-theologians to read Job as a depiction of the failure of wisdom, and she sums up the poem's message thus:

> *Job* marks the failure of wisdom…In his reliance on his own experience Job is obeying the rules of wisdom and yet his experience proves that an order cannot be known through man's experience, nor can God be known. Thus *Job* negates the quest for order, both in the human sphere and in the divine realm, a quest which is the keynote of the wisdom exercise.[33]

God's appearance before Job works to challenge human egotism and humanity's belief in the supremacy of its wisdom. For Dell, much of the story is 'almost an attack

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[27] Katherine J. Dell, 'The Significance of the Wisdom Tradition in the Ecological Debate', in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. by David G. Horrell, Cherryl Hunt, Christopher Southgate and Francesca Stavrakopoulou (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 56-70 (p. 57).
[28] Brown, p. 4.
[29] Deane-Drummond, p. 93.
[30] Dell, 'Significance', p. 57.
[31] 'Due to the focus on Genesis and to some of the less positive sentiments about dominion that can be traced back, in modern times, to the seminal article of Lynn White (1967), it has been assumed that this kind of view is a consistent one throughout the Old Testament when it comes to creation ideas' (Dell, 'Significance', p. 57).
[32] *Ibid*., p. 57.
[33] *Ibid*., *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), p. 82.

on anthropocentrism in that a key message...is that human beings do not always have all the answers'.[34] This message is important to bear in mind in this study of wisdom in the riddles.

In its denial of anthropocentrism, Job introduces us to a world in which natural events occur that humans do not know about, have not considered, or have not the capacity to understand. This is an unfamiliar world, a world far away from (and yet, in reality, incredibly close to) the post-lapsarian world of making, shaping, harnessing and using in which humans live and labour. At the centre of this 'other' world is a relationship between nature and God that humans are not a part of, a relationship which is not even within the scope of human imagination. We are reminded of this relationship when God questions Job about rain and where it falls:

> Quis dedit vehementissimo imbri cursum,
> Et viam sonantis tonitrui,
> Ut plueret super terram absque homine in deserto,
> Ubi nullus mortalium commoratur,
> Ut impleret inviam et desolatam,
> Et produceret herbas virentes?
> (Job, 38.25-27)[35]

There is an emphasis here, created by repetition, on the absence of humans from the places in which the rain falls. God is clearly challenging a limited anthropocentric view of the world by telling Job about things that happen, about places that receive God's bounty, that humans have no knowledge of. Job 38.25-27 supports Dell's assertion that 'the natural world has inherent value in and of itself and as God's creation, whether

[34] Dell, 'Significance', p. 56.
[35] 'Who gave a course to violent showers, or a way for noisy thunder:
That it should rain on the earth without man in the wilderness, where no mortal dwelleth:
That it should fill the desert and desolate land, and should bring forth green grass?'

or not there are any humans to interact with it'.[36] During his exposé of humanity's limited, anthropocentric knowledge, God also reminds Job that there are animals that will not serve humans, including the rhinoceros:

> Numquid volet rhinoceros servire tibi,
> Aut morabitur ad praesepe tuum?
> Numquid alligabis rhinocerota ad arandum loro tuo,
> Aut confringet glebas vallium post te?
> Numquid fiduciam habebis in magna fortitudine eius,
> Et derelinques ei labores tuos?
> Numquid credes illi quod sementem reddat tibi,
> Et aream tuam congreget?
> (Job, 39.9-12)[37]

God reminds Job that there are free creatures outside of his (humanity's) own world; it is implied that the rhinoceros, unlike, say, the domesticated ox, cannot be expected to plough the fields and gather the harvest. This passage about the rhinoceros, with its allusions to displaced labour, seems scornful of human dominion in the fact that it clearly anticipates the answer 'no'. It alludes to humanity's role as a master of the natural world through the reference to ropes and service, not as the caretaker of it; but it only alludes to that role to show its limited extent. God's description of the leviathan further illustrates humanity's inability to control all created things and is again scornful of humanity's post-lapsarian mastery. God asks Job:

> An extrahere poteris leviathan hamo,
> Et fune ligabis linguam eius?
> Numquid pones circulum in naribus eius,
> Aut armilla perforabis maxillam eius?
> Numquid multiplicabit ad te preces,
> Aut loquetur tibi mollia?

[36] Dell, 'Significance', p. 65.

[37] 'Shall the rhinoceros be willing to serve thee, or will he stay at thy crib?
Canst thou bind the rhinoceros with thy thong to plough, or will he break the clods of the valleys after thee?
Wilt thou have confidence in his great strength, and leave thy labours to him?
Wilt thou trust him that he will render thee the seed, and gather it into thy barnfloor?'

Numquid feriet tecum pactum,
At accipies eum servum sempiternum?
Numquid illudes ei quasi avi,
Aut ligabis eum ancillis tuis?
Concident eum amici?
Divident illum negotiatores?
Numquid implebis sagenas pelle eius,
Et gurgustium piscium capite illius?
Pone super eum manum tuam;
Memento belli, nec ultra addas loqui.
Ecce spes eius frustrabitur eum,
Et videntibus cunctis praecipitabitur.
(Job, 40.20-28)[38]

Humans, God implies, cannot skin the creature or harness it, as they would be able to with other animals. The double bridle, the skinning of an animal and its division for food, the leash – these are all things that fall within humanity's view of the created world, but such actions are useless when humans are faced with the sea beast. This passage is particularly interesting for the way God makes no distinction between human and animal enslavement. God talks of verbal supplications, apparently anthropomorphising the leviathan, yet the leviathan is not fully anthropomorphised because humans cannot force the beast to serve them or, indeed, fully understand him.

This simultaneous use and denial of anthropocentrism is something we have become familiar with in this study of the Exeter Book riddles. Many of the riddles discussed thus far depict bound and harnessed creatures that are enslaved by human beings, or natural resources that are transformed into new objects that must serve

[38] 'Canst thou draw out the leviathan with a hook, or canst thou tie his tongue with a cord?
Canst thou put a ring in his nose, or bore through his jaw with a buckle?
Will he make many supplications to thee, or speak soft words to thee?
Will he make a covenant with thee, and wilt thou take him to be a servant for ever?
Shalt thou play with him as with a bird, or tie him up for thy handmaids?
Shall friends cut him in pieces, shall merchants divide him?
Wilt thou fill nets with his skin, and the cabins of fishes with his head?
Lay thy hand upon him: remember the battle, and speak no more.
Behold his hope shall fail him, and in the sight of all he shall be cast down.'

their human masters. These normally marginalised creatures, I have shown, vocalise their own misfortunes and invert traditional anthropocentric depictions of the created world. Nevertheless, they still fall within the scope of humanity's anthropocentric world view – that is, however unfamiliar the riddle writers make the subjects, the subjects are part of the domesticated, familiar world in which humans live and with which they interact every day. Many of the subjects describe themselves according to how they serve humans or how useful they are to their human users. Some riddles, however – the riddles that are the focus of this chapter – depict forces of nature that are free from the bonds and chains of humans, 'creatures' of creation whose mysterious ways humanity, despite its supremacy, cannot control and, for all its wisdom, does not fully understand.

Our final point to consider about wisdom and anthropocentrism before moving on to the riddles themselves is the role of the rhetorical questions used by God. Throughout Job, God poses a series of questions about the created world. *Interrogabo te, et responde mihi,* God says (Job, 38.3).[39] God plays a question and answer game, at the end of which Job is made to identify God as the one who controls the elements and the one who has knowledge of all created things – *Scio quia omnia potes*, Job says humbly (Job, 42.2).[40] But God's words do not so much as test Job's knowledge as expose the limits of his knowledge. God's questions are largely rhetorical, used to chastise Job and men like Elihu for their belief in their own wisdom. God says such things *asindica mihi, si habes intelligentiam* and *indica mihi, si nosti, omnia* (Job, 38. 4, 18).[41] God's dressing-down of Job leans towards the sardonic, with God expressing if not grim amusement (Job has greatly angered Him, after all), then incredulity at

[39] 'I will ask thee, and answer thou me.'
[40] 'I know that thou canst do all things.'
[41] 'tell me if thou hast understanding' and 'tell me, if thou knowest all things'.

humanity's so-called wisdom, at the audacity of Elihu, who considers himself to have *perfecta scientia* 'perfect knowledge' (Job, 36.4). *Sciebas tunc quod nasciturus esses, et numerum dierum tuorum noveras?* (Job, 38.21)[42] he asks, when interrogating Job about the dwelling place of darkness – a 'sarcastic comment,' Norman C. Habel says, 'addressed to Job as if he were the first human being'.[43] It is not just the content of God's questions but the nature of His questioning that challenges humanity's belief in its own knowledge and centrism. The nature of his questioning is something we must bear in mind as we turn to the riddles, especially since God's words mirror the traditional riddler's challenge, the exposing of the addressee's ignorance by the riddler.[44]

'mengo wundra': Riddle 84

The answer to Riddle 84 has been accepted as 'water' by all critics. It is one of the rarely discussed riddles, perhaps because of its apparent lack of artistic integrity ('the last surviving lines are fresh but overall the riddle is repetitive and rather wooden', says Crossley-Holland)[45] or because the riddle is so badly damaged. Yet there is much in this text that can illuminate humanity's relationship with the created world. The riddle's creature is a part of the created world that is more mysterious in origin than some of the other Exeter Book riddle subjects. She is an element, and like the fire of Riddle 50, she is *wundrum acenned* 'born in wonder' (R. 84, 1b).[46] Unlike manmade subjects,

[42] 'Didst thou know then that thou shouldst be born? And did thou know the number of thy days?'
[43] Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), p. 565.
[44] Says Hansen, 'the riddler devises a question precisely intended to expose the addressee's ignorance…The speaker asserts power over the addressee and calls attention to the limitations of the addressee's knowledge and imagination' (p. 131).
[45] Kevin Crossley-Holland, trans., *The Exeter Book Riddles* (London: Enitharmon, 2008), p. 111.
[46] The fire is *wundrum acenned…of dumbum twam / torht atyhted* 'born in wonder…produced, bright, from two dumb ones' (R. 50, 1b-3a).

God has seen her *or ond ende* 'origin and end' (R. 84, 10a), she is born, as opposed to killed and transformed, and she is the mother other things: *Moder is monigra mærre wihta* 'she is the mother of many great creatures' (R. 84, 4a-b).[47] The riddle writer describes the water's value to humans – a commonplace descriptor in the riddles, examples of which we have seen in the previous chapter – but also its majesty, power and appetite:

> hio biþ eadgum leof, earmum getæse,
> freolic, sellic. Fromast ond swiþost,
> gifrost ond grædgost– grundbedd trideþ–
> þæs þe under lyfte aloden wurde
> ond ælda bearn eagum sawe.
> (R. 84, 28a-32b)[48]

There is something monstrous about the water here. She is powerful and is said to have a huge appetite; she also *trideþ* 'treads' (or 'walks'/'tramples') the ground – a verb not commonly associated with flowing water.[49] The subject is reminiscent of the beasts in Job – the leviathan and the behemoth – ancient, powerful creatures created by God that humans cannot harm or control. The narrator talks of the water's *fyrn forðgesceaft* 'ancient creation' and we may be reminded of the behemoth who is *ipse est principium viarum Dei* (Job, 40.14).[50] The leviathan has 'mighty power' and 'graceful proportions' – it is powerful but also beautiful – and this is similar to the way

[47] The sword in Riddle 20, in contrast, cannot produce offspring – *ic þolian sceal / bearngestreona* 'I must go without children', the sword laments (R. 20, 26b-27a).

[48] 'She is dear to the prosperous, useful to the poor, free, strange; she walks the ground the boldest and strongest, the greediest and most voracious of that which has grown under the sky and that the children of men's eyes have seen.' My translation of lines 29b-32b largely follows that of Williamson, who offers 'It treads the ground, boldest and strongest, greediest and most eager of whatever has grown up under the sky and (of whatever) the children of men may have seen' (*Riddles*, p. 372)

[49] *Trideþ* in Old English poetry is sometimes translated as 'travels', but it should be pointed out that the poet of Riddle 84 has used *fareð* 'travels' and *ferende* 'travelling' to describe the water's movements earlier on in the text, and then appears to change to *trideþ* later. This is not for the purpose of alliteration ('g' is the alliterative letter of line 30), nor, I think, to help disguise the identity of the object (this is one of the most easily solvable and most transparent riddles).

[50] 'the beginning of the ways of God'.

Riddle 84's water is described. The water is *cræfte eacen* 'endowed with excellence' (R. 84, 27b) and, as it travels, its *mægen bið gemiclad, meaht gesweotlad* 'power is increased, [its] might manifested' (R. 84, 24a-b). The riddle writer uses superlatives to describe the power and appetite of the water; she is the *fromast ond swiþost* 'boldest and strongest', *gifrost ond grædgost* 'greediest and most voracious' of all created things on Earth (R. 84, 29b-30a). She is also said to *grimme grymetað* 'roar fiercely' as she *be grunde fareð* 'travels along the ground' (R. 84, 3a-b).

Significantly, the subject is *freolic* 'free' (R. 84, 29a);[51] she is not enslaved by humans, and this freedom reminds us of the ancient beasts that cannot be bridled or bound by humans. Interestingly, in what I suggest is a playful twist, the water can be pierced by human beings, whereas a Biblical beast cannot. She *deaðe ne feleð* 'does not feel death' (R. 84, 50b), *þeah* 'though' something is said to *hrif wundigen* 'wound [her] belly' (R. 84, 52b). Williamson supplies *du* as part of the obscured word for the 'thing' that wounds her,[52] and it is possible that the word is *wudu*, which could be interpreted as ship or spear, as either could stir the water (something is said to *hreren* 'move'/'stir'/'shake') and 'wound [her] belly'.[53] A spear might pierce her 'belly' as it is thrust through the water to skewer a fish, or, more likely, a ship might cut through the waves, stirring the surface of the water. These damaged lines echo the irony found in lines 2-3 of Aldhelm's Riddle 29 'water': *Dum virtute fero silvarum robora mille, / Ast acus exilis mox tanta gestamina rumpit*.[54] Water is strong enough to carry 'a thousand forest oaks' (perhaps meaning a ship or a fleet), but its surface is weak enough to be pierced by a needle.

[51] It should be noted that *freolic* can also mean 'noble', the idea being that the nobility are free (i.e. not enslaved).
[52] Williamson, *Riddles*, p. 114. The letters 'du' can be seen clearly at the start of the line on the manuscript.
[53] *Wudu* translates as 'ship' in Riddle 3 (R. 3, 24b).
[54] 'by secret strength a thousand forest oaks / I carry, yet a slender needle breaks / this mighty wain'.

Riddle 84 tells us of a creature that is mighty and free, an ancient creation that is reminiscent of those ancient creatures in Job, which God brings to Job's attention to remind him that humans have a limited, highly anthropocentric view of the created world. But the riddle does more than this; it tells the reader that this creature is one that humans cannot adequately describe, with many kindred that they cannot count:

> Nænig oþrum mæg
> wlite ond wisan wordum gecyþan,
> hu mislic biþ mægen þara cynna,
> fyrn forðgesceaft;
> (R. 84, 6b-9a)[55]

Some things, The Book of Job tells us, are beyond the words of human beings and cannot be described or understood, even by the wise. As Job says after God rebukes him, 'I uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know' (Job, 42.3). Riddle 84 alludes to this state of ignorance, saying that no one can adequately describe the subject's appearance and nature. I believe these lines in Riddle 84 are suggesting a similar notion. To support this, we can turn to lines 33a-35b, where, describing the subject's strength and voraciousness, the narrator says:

> swa þæt wuldor wifeð, worldbearna mægen,
> þeah þe ferþum gleaw [gefrigen hæbbe]
> mon mode snottor mengo wundra.
> (R. 84, 33a-35b)[56]

[55] 'No one can make known in words her appearance and nature, how various is the power of her kin, her ancient origin.'

[56] 'In such a manner that glorious one weaves the power of wordly offspring, though the wise heart, the sagacious mind of man [has learned from enquiry] a multitude of wonders.' Tupper (*Riddles*, p. 58) and Trautmann (*BBA*, p. 47) have both supplied *gefrigen hæbbe* at line 34b, which I have reflected in my citation of the text.

The lines refer to the way the water 'weaves', although it is hard to discern quite what it is that the water is weaving.[57] Regrettably, there is a manuscript lacuna at line 34b, which affects the sense of this passage. However, we can be certain that lines 34a-35b are clearly referring to the wisdom of human beings. Tupper and Trautmann's rendering of line 34b as *gefrigen hæbbe* 'learned from enquiry' is both fitting and reasonable, although purely derived from context. The conjunctive *þeah* 'though' seems to say that *even though* humans are wise they are unable to do/say/know something about the subject. It is something within the worldview of humans – it is something *ælda bearn eagum sawe* 'the eyes of the children of men saw' – but it extends beyond the scope of human imagination and the limits of their words. Human words, however wise, are, after all, *sermonibus imperitis* 'words without knowledge' (Job, 38.2). The water is, like so many aspects of God's creation, too wonderful for words.

Interpreting the riddle in this way, I take issue with the argument that 'the power of the riddler is to describe the miraculous and to enclose the limitless by signifying words', as Williamson says in reference to Riddle 84's lines 6b-9a.[58] The complex topic of power and control through the medium of poetry is far too big a topic to discuss here, but I do believe this discussion goes some way to refuting claims that such notions exist in the riddles, at least in this riddle. Neville observes that '[Anglo-Saxon writers] do not betray any self-conscious awareness of the ironic reversal of power that they effected in representing the natural world – there is no direct evidence that they were conscious of the power that they exercised as they used and manipulated

[57] Williamson suggests that weaving is a reference 'to the power of water to weave the destiny of all the creatures of the world'. He refers to line 4, where the water is described as the *moder* 'mother' of *monigra mærre wihta* 'many great creatures' (*Riddles*, pp. 372-3). Wyatt admits to finding the meaning of these lines hard to understand, even when *gefrigen habbe* is supplied (p. 119).
[58] Williamson, *Riddles*, p. 360.

the natural world in their writing.'[59] Despite this lack of self-conscious awareness, both Neville and Hansen argue that certain texts seem to 'enclose' the natural world in their representations of it. Hansen argues that language as a system 'is a powerful and mysterious instrument with which human beings control the uncertainty and create the meaning of their environment and their experiences in it',[60] whilst Neville suggests that in Aldhelm's riddles 'the natural world is presented as fully subordinated to the intellectual activity of exploiting interesting connections, wordplay and literary skill'.[61] Whether or not Aldhelm's riddles achieve this subordination of nature through literacy is beyond the limits of this thesis, but what is clear is that Riddle 84 argues against the power of humans to describe and, by describing, control the created world. I argue that lines 6b-9a of Riddle 84 are not ironic but rather refer to the concept found in The Book of Job that human beings cannot describe all of God's creations, especially those creations that are *freolic* 'free' and *sellic* 'strange'. Lines 6b-9a observe the limitations of words rather than showing an awareness of the power of writing, an awareness that, it has been acknowledged, might not have existed in Anglo-Saxon writing.

Interrogating Wisdom in the Storm Riddles

Riddles 1, 2, and 3 are typically solved as various types of storm.[62] Williamson treats the riddles as one single riddle, which he solves as 'wind', but I follow the majority of

[59] Neville, *Representations*, p. 179.
[60] Hansen, p. 147.
[61] Neville, *Representations*, p. 193.
[62] Trautmann suggests just one answer, 'storm', for all three riddles. See Trautmann, *Die altenglischen Rätsel (Die Rätsel des Exeterbuchs)* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1895), p. 65. Dietrich solves the three riddles as various types of storm (p. 461), as does Wyatt (p. viii & 66-68), whilst the umbrella term 'storm riddles' is used by Tupper (*Riddles*, p. xv). Kennedy argues that Riddles 2 and 3 make up one single 'wind' riddle (p. 368). Williamson suggests Riddles 1-3 should all be read together as 'wind' (pp. 140 & 127), whilst Lapidge also sees the three texts as one riddle. See 'Stoic Cosmology and the Source of the First Old English Riddle', *Anglia*, 112 (1994), 1-25. John Miles Foley suggests they should all be read as 'apocalyptic storm'. See Foley, '"Riddle I" of the Exeter Book: The Apocalyptical Storm', *Neophilologus*, 77 (1976), 347-57. Erhardt-Siebold suggests all three should be solved as 'the atmosphere' (treating 2 and 3 as one riddle) in her article 'The Old English Storm Riddles', *PMLA*,

editors who treat each text separately.[63] It has been argued that 'the details of the riddle[s] derive from medieval and classical notions of meteorology'.[64] One of the few critics to solve the riddles as anything other than a natural force is Mitchell, whose argument that Riddle 1 has 'nothing whatever to do with nature' and is, in fact, 'army' was discussed in the introduction to this thesis. To read the solution as having 'nothing whatever to do with nature', I suggested in the introduction, is to read it from a highly anthropocentric perspective, a perspective that is unnecessary for what is clearly an engagement with the power and mysteries of the created world, a world beyond the full understanding of human beings. I read it instead – along with the two subsequent storm riddles – as an engagement with the notion that humans cannot control or know everything about the created world. This reading takes into consideration not just the imagery employed by the poet, but the riddles' rhetoric, too, which involves using sarcastic address to question the knowledge of the reader.

The associations these riddles have with The Book of Job are numerous, from the monstrous subjects to the rhetorical style. In these riddles we do not find monsters, *per se*, but natural forces parading as monsters. We have already seen how Riddle 84 shares aspects of God's descriptions of ancient monsters, but we can also see many aspects of these creatures in the storm riddles. In Job, the leviathan is a monstrous creature that causes fear and chaos if stirred up (Job, 40.1-25); in the storm riddles

64 (1949), 884-88 (p. 887). This is not an exhaustive list, but a summary of some of the key solutions. For a comprehensive list of answers given before 1981 see Donald K. Fry, 'Exeter Book Riddle Solutions', *Old English Newsletter*, 15 (1981), 22-33 (p. 22). For a discussion of the history of scholarship on these texts see Williamson, *Riddles*, pp. 127-33.

[63] One of the most persuasive facts towards the latter is that, 'the invitation in the closing lines of Riddles 1 and 2 follows a convention often used to round off the riddles' (Crossley-Holland, p. 84). It is unlikely that such a convention would be found part-way through a riddle. I do think it is possible that 2 and 3 are meant to be read together; however, the nature of my study does not require a full consideration of the possible divisions of these texts.

[64] See Williamson (*Riddles*, p. 130) and Kennedy (pp. 141-2 & pp. 366-68). See also Edmund Erlemann, 'Zu den altenglischen Rätseln', *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literäturen*, 115 (1905), 49-63. The critics discuss such sources as Pliny, Isidore, Lucretius and Bede.

the ‘beasts’ are stirred up and men flee in terror from their power. I have quoted the questions God poses to Job concerning the leviathan and his suggestion, couched in sardonic rhetoric, that humans could not hope to control the mighty sea beast; let us now take a look at God’s description of the strife and tumult at sea caused by its movements:

> Fervescere faciet quasi ollam profundum mare,
> Et ponet quasi cum unguenta bulliunt.
> Post eum lucebit semita;
> Aestimabit abyssum quasi senescentem.
> Non est super terram potestas quae comparetur ei,
> Qui factus est ut nullum timeret.
> (Job, 41.22-24)[65]

The image we have here is of a mighty beast stirring up the waters, making them foaming and white. This passage is comparable to the following lines of Riddle 2:

> Gifen biþ gewreged,
> fam gewealcen * * *
> hwælmere hlimmeð, hlude grimmeð;
> streamas staþu beatað, stundum weorpaþ
> on stealc hleoþa stane ond sonde,
> ware ond wæge, þonne ic winnende,
> holmmægne biþeaht, hrusan styrge,
> side sægrundas.
> (R. 2, 3b-10a)[66]

Here, too, we are led to imagine a mighty beast, who stirs up the waters and creates foam on the tumultuous sea. Likewise, in Riddle 3, the storm describes how *þurh geþræc þringan þrimme micle / ofer byrnan bosm* ‘with much might [I] force a way

[65] ‘He shall make the deep sea to boil like a pot, and shall make it as when ointments boil.
A path shall shine after him, he shall esteem the deep as growing old.
There is no power upon earth that can be compared with him who was made to fear no one.’
[66]‘The ocean is stirred up, the foam is rolled; the whale-sea roars, loudly rages, streams beat the shore, sometimes throw stone and sand onto steep cliffs, seaweed and wave, when I, striving, covered with the force of the ocean, stir the earth, the wide sea floors.’

through the tumult, over sea's bosom' (R. 3, 61a-62a). The reader might conjure up in his or her mind an image of a sea beast forcing its way through the waves, making the waters *famig* 'foamy' (R. 3, 19b). Equally monstrous, it causes *micel modþrea monna cynne* 'much anguish [for] mankind' (R. 3, 50), just as it is said to do in Job.

I also argue that the battle language found in the riddles – including that which leads Mitchell to the solution 'army' – has its source in The Book of Job. In Job 39.19-24, God poses questions about the horse, but this is not a horse bridled and subdued by humans:

> Numquid praebebis equo fortitudinem,
> Aut circumdabis collo eius hinnitum?
> Numquid suscitabis eum quasi locustas?
> Gloria marium eius terror.
> Terram ungula fodit, exultat audacter;
> In occursum pergit armatis.
> Contemnit pavorem,
> Nec cedit gladio.
> Super ipsum sonabit pharetra;
> Vibrabit hasta et clypeus;
> Fervens et fremens sorbet terram,
> Nec reputat tubae sonare clangorem.
> (Job, 39.19-24)[67]

This is an image of both a fierce beast and a warrior. Though the subject, a horse, is ultimately different, the language used to describe it is similar to that used to describe the storm in Riddle 1. The wind is *stundum reþ* 'at times fierce' (R. 1, 3b) and it is said to *astige strong* 'rise up strong' and *þrymful þunie* 'powerful[ly] thunder' (R. 1, 3-4). We might also say that it 'rejoices in its strength', just like the subjects of the other two

[67] 'Wilt thou give strength to the horse, or clothe his neck with neighing?
Wilt thou lift him up like the locusts? the glory of his nostrils is terror.
He breaketh up the earth with his hoof, he pranceth boldly, he goeth forward to meet armed men.
He despiseth fear, he turneth not his back to the sword,
Above him shall the quiver rattle, the spear and shield shall glitter.
Chasing and raging he swalloweth the ground, neither doth he make account when the noise of the trumpet soundeth.'

storm riddles. The wind is something that is not under human control, and in this respect, it is not like a human army at all. Like the fierce horse described in Job, the storm *nec reputat tubae sonare clangorem* (Job, 39.24). It is only through God's mastery that the wind can be subdued. This is, of course, the case in all of the storm riddles. In Riddle 1, the subject relates how *heahum meahtum* 'high powers' *wrecen* 'exiled' it *on waþe* 'on [its] journey' (R. 1, 10b-11a), whilst in Riddle 2 the subject describes how:

> Sundhelme ne mæg
> losian ær mec læte se þe min latteow bið
> on siþa gehwam.
> (R. 2, 10b-12a)[68]

In Riddle 3, the subject is free from human mastery but is a *þrymful þeow* 'mighty slave' under God (R. 3, 67a).

In The Book of Job, God questions Job on his knowledge of the created world, asking who truly has the understanding of all its various aspects. He admonishes Job for thinking himself wise, saying

> Ubi eras quando ponebam fundamenta terrae?
> Indica mihi, si habes intelligentiam.
> Quis posuit mensuras eius, si nosti?
> Vel quis tetendit super eam lineam?
> Super quo bases illius solidatae sunt?
> Aut quis demisit lapidem angularem eius,
> cum me laudarent simul astra matutina,
> Et iubilarent omnes filii Dei?
> Quis conclusit ostiis mare,
> Quando erumpebat quasi de vulva procedens;
> Cum ponerem nubem vestimentum eius,
> Et caligine illud quasi pannis infantiae obvolverem?
> Circumdedi illud terminis meis,
> Et posui vectem et ostia,

[68] 'I cannot escape the sea covering before the one who is my leader looses me on every journey.'

Et dixi: Usque huc venies, et non procedes amplius,
Et hic confringes tumentes fluctus tuos.
(Job, 38.4-11)[69]

In Riddle 3, we find the same questions about who confines the water:

Hwilum mec min frea fæste genearwað,
sendeð þonne under salwonges
bearm bradan, ond on bid wriceð,
þrafað on þystrum þrymma sumne,
hæste on enge, þær me heord siteð
hruse on hrycge.
(R. 3, 1a-6a)[70]

Then, the narrator says, all *stille þynceð / lyft ofer londe* 'the air over the land seems still', *oþþæt* 'until'

…ic of enge up aþringe,
efne swa mec wisaþ se mec wræde on
æt frumsceafte furþum legde,
bende ond clomme, þæt ic onbugan ne mot
of þæs gewealde þe me wegas tæcneð.
(R. 3, 12a-16b)[71]

The subject also asks the solver to *saga hwa mec þecce* 'say who clothes me' (R. 3, 14b) and this is reminiscent of Job 38.9 where God says that when the sea issued out

[69] 'Where wast thou when I laid up the foundations of the earth? tell me if thou hast understanding.
Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?
Upon what are its bases grounded? or who laid the corner stone thereof,
When the morning stars praised me together, and all the sons of God made a joyful melody?
Who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth as issuing out of the womb:
When I made a cloud the garment thereof, and wrapped it in a mist as in swaddling bands?
I set my bounds around it, and made it bars and doors:
And I said: Hitherto thou shalt come, and shalt go no further, and here thou shalt break thy swelling waves.'

[70] 'Sometimes my lord firmly confines me, sends me then under the broad bosom of the fertile plain, and drives me, a certain one of the powers, to a halt, restrains [me] in the dark, violently in a corner, where the hard earth sits on my back.'

[71] '…I burst out of the corner, just as the one guides me, who at creation first laid bonds and chains on me so that I might not be allowed to escape from the control of the one who teaches me the ways.'

of the *vulva* 'womb' He *cum ponerem nubem vestimentum* 'made a cloud the garment', and *caligine illud quasi pannis infantiae obvolverem* 'wrapped it in a mist as in swaddling bands', personifying the sea as a new-born infant which He himself clothed.

Giving the subjects beast-like qualities makes them more tangible; that is, the poets give flesh to elusive forces. This is also true of the water riddle that 'treads' the earth and has a voracious, corporeal appetite. Not only can the subject be 'clothed', but there are also references in Riddles 1 and 3 to the creatures having backs. In Riddle 1 the subject describes how it has that which *hadas wreah* 'covered people' on its *hrycge* 'back'. In Riddle 3 there are three instances: the hard earth *siteð* 'sits' on its *hrycge* (R. 3, 6a), *won wægfatu* 'water-vessels' *on bæce rideð* 'ride on [its] back' (R. 3, 36b), and it has a *hlade* 'load' on its *hrycg* 'back', given by its *frean* 'lord' (R. 3, 65-66).[72] They do not have all the body parts of some of the Exeter Book riddles' creatures,[73] but the use of 'back' is enough to give a sense of physical shape to the otherwise intangible elements, a physical shape that strengthens their connection to the beasts of Job 38-41.

In the storm riddles we encounter the idea at the heart of The Book of Job: that humans do not know everything about the created world, even though they deem themselves wise. God asks Job whether he has *Numquid ingressus es profunda maris? Et in novissimis abyssi deambulasti?* (Job, 38.16),[74] reminding him that there are places on earth unknown to humans, places they have not visited and cannot comprehend. He asks Job:

[72] The things they carry on their backs are also material, tangible things; they carry 'clothes' (that which *hadas wreah* 'covered people'), 'water vessels' (lending the clouds physicality), and *heord* 'hard' earth.
[73] See Riddle 31's creature, for example, with its *neb* 'beak' and *fet ond folme fugele gelice* 'feet and hands like a bird' (31.6b-7b), or Riddle 32, whose creature has *anum fet* 'one foot', *fela ribba* 'many ribs', and a *muð* 'mouth' in its *middan* 'middle' (32.6b-9a). It should be noted, however, that the poets of these riddles are describing physical objects with features that actually resemble body parts.
[74] 'Hast thou entered into the depths of the sea, and walked in the lowest parts of the deep?'

In qua via lux habitet,
Et tenebrarum quis locus sit:
Ut ducas unumquodque ad terminos suos,
Et intelligas semitas domus eius.
(Job, 38.19-20)[75]

In Riddle 2, the force being described goes to places that humans cannot imagine:

Hwlium ic gewite, swa ne wenaþ men,
under yþa geþræc eorþan secan,
garsecges grund.
(R. 2, 1a-3a)[76]

These lines, which open the riddle, say that there are places to which this creature goes – the depths of the sea – that humans do not know about or cannot imagine. Perhaps the most obvious challenges to human wisdom in the storm riddles, however, come in the form of questions posed to the readers.

The rhetorical intent of God's questioning of Job is very similar to the rhetorical design of the storm riddles, especially Riddle 1. Riddle 1's subject is given a voice not dissimilar to God's voice and employs a similar rhetoric, a type of sarcastic address to make the reader feel inferior; sarcasm is a key rhetorical trope in both the Old and New Testament, 'used either in personal ridicule or rebuke',[77] and echoes of this trope can be found in Riddle 1. T. A. Shippey says that 'a characteristic part of Anglo-Saxon humour is grim amusement from the wise at the expense of those who cannot understand words and do not share their vision of reality'.[78] He says both that 'wisdom

[75] 'Where is the way where light dwelleth, and where is the place of darkness:
That thou mayst bring every thing to its own bounds, and understand the paths of the house thereof.'
[76] 'Sometimes I depart, as men do not imagine, under the waves' tumult, seek the earth, the ocean's ground.'
[77] Timothy Wilt, *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference* (Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 2014), p. 198.
[78] Shippey, 'Grim Wordplay: Folly and Wisdom in Anglo-Saxon Humor', in *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. by Jonathan Wilcox (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 12-32 (p. 48).

find[s] grim amusement in folly'[79] and that there can be 'a sardonic quality to Anglo-Saxon humour'.[80] But sarcasm is not always humorous and can be used as an aggressive type of speech act. 'What is essential to sarcasm,' says John Haiman, 'is that it is overt irony *intentionally used by the speaker as a form of verbal aggression*, and it may thus be contrasted with other aggressive speech acts, among them the put-on, direct insults, curses, vituperation, nagging and condescension'.[81] Examples of non-humorous sarcasm in Old English literature can be found in *Beowulf*, in the exchanges between Unferth and Beowulf. Responding to Unferth's own sarcastic jibes,[82] Beowulf 'turns to sarcasm' to discuss Unferth's lack of heroic exploits:[83]

> Breca naefre git
> æt heaðolace, ne gehwæþer incer,
> swa deorlice dæd gefremede
> fagum sweordum (no ic þæs gylpe),
> þeah ðu þinum broðrum to banan wurde,
> heafodmægum;
> (*Beowulf*, 583b-88a)[84]

Here, Beowulf offers a 'sarcastic reversal'[85] to Unferth's jibes by suggesting that Unferth's killing of his brothers was his *deorlice deed*, with the effect of belittling his opponent. A similar effect is achieved in Riddle 1 where the narrator uses a sarcastic form of address to demean the reader:

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[79] *Ibid*., p. 46.
[80] *Ibid*., p. 39.
[81] John Haiman, *Talk Is Cheap: Sarcasm, Alienation, and the Evolution of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 20. Italics are the author's own. For further discussion of the rhetoric of the Unferth and Beowulf speeches see Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 247-53.
[82] For examples see Peter Stuart Baker, *The Beowulf Reader* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2000), p. 141.
[83] Ruth Johnston Staver, *A Companion to Beowulf* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), p. 46.
[84] 'Breca never performed, nor either of you two, such brave deeds in battle with blood-stained swords – I do not boast of this – though you did become the slayer of your brothers, your near relations.'
[85] Baker, p. 143.

Hwylc is hæleþa þæs horsc ond þæs hygecræftig
þæt þæt mæge asecgan, hwa mec on sið wræce,
þonne ic astige strong, stundum reþe,
þrymful þunie, þragum wræce
fere geond foldan, folcsalo bærne,
ræced reafige?

(R. 1, 1a-6a)[86]

While this opening might be read as a 'typical' riddle challenge, when read in the light of the rhetoric of Job it is sounds more like a challenge 'from above' – from a greater authority – used to berate humans on their audacity and knowledge.

Taking this approach to the opening of Riddle 1, we can justify the translation of *horsc* as 'brave' or 'daring' as opposed to 'intelligent'; read in this way, it seems to ask who has the very gall to attempt to demonstrate his or her knowledge of those mysteries that are known to God alone. In Job 38.2, God suggests that Job will require an element of bravery to enter into a contest of knowledge with Him. These lines read *accinge sicut vir lumbos tuos* and are translated from the Vulgate as 'gird up thy loins like a man', but have also been translated as 'prepare yourself like a man',[87] 'brace yourself like a man',[88] 'dress for action like a man',[89] and 'gird up your loins like a hero'.[90] The Hebrew *geber* can mean simply 'man', but can also be interpreted as a 'mighty man' or 'warrior'.[91] In Riddle 1, we find a similar challenge – we might even translate *hæleþa* as 'hero' to reflect the derisive nature of the challenge.

[86] 'What man is so daring and so thought-crafty that he can say who exiles me on my journey, when I rise up strong, fierce at times, resound powerfully, at times travel through the land in vengeance, burn the people's building, ravage the hall?'
[87] New King James Version.
[88] New International Version.
[89] English Standard Version.
[90] Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, p. 33.
[91] Samuel E. Balentine, '"What are Human Beings, that You Make So Much of Them?" Divine Disclosure from the Whirlwind: "Look at Behemoth"', in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), pp. 259-278 (p. 265).

In a similar way, Riddle 3 asks *hwa gestilleð þæt?* 'Who stills it?' (R. 3, 35b), referring to the beast-like storm. The reader is asked to provide the answer to more than one question and, by doing so, contemplate the mysteries of the earth's movements and forces. The reader may feel confident she knows the answer ('wind' or 'storm'), but that does not mean she has solved the other, greater, mysteries of the storm itself. Riddle 3 ends:

Saga hwæt ic hatte,
Oþþe hwa mec ræreþonne ic restan ne mot,
Oþþe hwa mec stæðþeþonne ic stille beom.
(R. 3, 72b-74b)[92]

Significantly, Riddle 2, unlike Riddles 1 and 3, does not ask the reader to identify the subject being described; instead the reader is asked to identify who controls the subject:

Saga, þoncol mon,
hwa mec bregdeof brimes fæþmum
þonne streamas eftstille weorþað,
yþa geþwære,þe mec ær wrugon.
(R. 2, 12b-15b)[93]

The riddle does not end in the traditional way by asking what the subject is. Instead, we are asked to recognise God as the master of his subject, to recognise the powers of the Creator, just as Job says humbly to God, 'I know that You can do everything' (Job, 42.2). The entire function of the riddle – if we consider it simply as a question

[92] 'Say what I am called, or who raises me when I cannot rest, or who contains me when I am still?'
[93] 'Say, wise man, who draws me from the sea's embrace, when streams become still again, the waves gentle, which before had covered me.'

and answer game – has been side-lined (or ignored) in this instance. This similarity testifies to the fact that the storm riddles are more than a game that requires a straightforward answer.

This style of rhetoric, involving repeated questions, does not appear in any other Exeter Book riddle. We do, however, find variations of the challenge to wise readers to find the solution. Riddle 32, for example, ends with the words *Rece, gif þu cunne, wis worda gleaw, hwæt sio wiht sie* 'explain, if you can, wise one skilled in words, what the creature is' (R. 32, 13b-14b). The narrator asks the reader to make a statement and uses the conjunctive 'if' to challenge the reader's intellectual ability. Riddle 35 similarly ends with *saga soðcwidum, searoþoncum gleaw, / wordum wisfæst, hwæt þis gewæde sy* 'you, wise in cunning thoughts [and] wise in words, say in truthful words what this garment might be' (R. 35, 13a-14b), and, likewise, Riddle 55 ends with the challenge: *nu me þisses gieddes / ondsware ywe, se hine on mede / wordum secgan hu se wudu hatte* 'now you give me the answer to this riddle, if you think you can say with words what this wood is called' (R. 55, 14b-16b). What is more, some of the riddles that are harder to solve tell the reader he or she has much to think about: *Micel is to hycganne / wisfæstum men, hwæt seo wiht sy* 'There is much for the wise man to consider what this creature is', says the narrator of Riddle 28 (R. 28, 12b-13a), whilst the narrator of Riddle 31 says *Micel is to hycgenne / wisum woðboran, hwæt sio wiht sie* 'Much there is to consider for the wise speaker, what this creature is' (R. 31), and the narrator of Riddle 41 says *þæt is to geþencanne / þeoda gehwylcum, / wisfæstum werum, / hwæt seo wiht sy* 'wise men of each nation are to consider what this creature might be' (R. 41, 8-9). The difference between these challenges and those of the storm riddles is that clever, erudite readers should be able to answer these riddles because the subject lies within their sphere of knowledge,

whereas the storm riddles are describing more mysterious creations whose ways are known only to God. Indeed, this difference may offer us an insight into the difference between knowledge, intelligence and wisdom in this collection: clever, learned readers may be able to solve certain riddles about ships or mailcoats, but do they have the wisdom and knowledge to understand the world's greater mysteries, such as the dwelling place of the wind or the nature of water?

Conclusions

This chapter has taken us away from the ethics of humanity's interaction with the created world to a consideration of the limitations of human knowledge of the created world. One of the goals of eco-theologians is to uncover the voice of the Earth in Biblical wisdom literature and to show how the wisdom genre questions the dominant anthropocentric view of the world. I have demonstrated how certain Exeter Book riddles offer a similar view of human wisdom and intelligence, arguing that Riddle 84 and the storm riddles share many similarities with the Book of Job – an Old Testament narrative all about the limits of wisdom. Like Job, these riddles describe leviathan-like creatures that are beyond human control and depict a relationship between God and Earth that humans are not a part of and cannot hope to imagine.

I have also shown how Riddle 84 and the storm riddles challenge readers' beliefs in their own powers of 'knowing' and thus resist this 'quintessential anthropocentric act of appropriation'.[94] Whilst the intelligent reader can prove his or her knowledge by supplying answers to a number of the riddles, Riddle 84 and the storm riddles invite the reader to contemplate the limited nature of human knowledge.

[94] Fromm, p. 4.

This study has revealed that there are similarities between God's rhetoric in The Book of Job and the rhetoric of the storm riddles, particularly the rhetoric of Riddle 1. Like God in Job, Riddle 1's narrator uses a sarcastic form of address to deride humanity's so-called wisdom and challenge its audience to contemplate creation's deeper mysteries.

In light of this study of wisdom, it is easy to see how Mitchell's highly anthropocentric reading of Riddle 1 as 'army' does not correlate with the text's theological and ecological concerns. Not only does Mitchell's reading reduce the mysterious powers created and harnessed by God to mere metaphor, but it also ignores both the riddle's powerful rhetoric and its allusions to *heahum meahtum* 'high powers' – to the subject's master who *wræce* 'exiles' and *þecce* 'covers' it.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to explore the ways in which the riddles resist anthropocentrism in their depictions of the natural world and to generate new ways of reading these enigmatic texts using the principles of eco-criticism and eco-theology. Taking the cue from Low, who has argued for more eco-critical readings of Old English texts, I have turned the ecological gaze on to the Exeter Book riddles in order to excavate Anglo-Saxon attitudes to the non-human world. Neville's *Representations* has provided a comprehensive, in-depth study of the natural world in the riddles and beyond; what I have tried to do is refocus the critical gaze on the natural world from nature's point-of-view. What has become apparent is that it is possible, indeed valuable, to discuss resistance to anthropocentrism in these enigmatic texts and that eco-critical explorations of these texts are long overdue.

In fact, the riddle-poets' interests in the material world and humanity's use of it has produced undoubtedly the most ecologically aware texts in the Old English corpus. It is worth recalling here Tupper's 1910 introduction to the Exeter Book riddles and his assertion that what all the riddles have in common is their human interest.[1] It is true that human beings are a strong presence in the texts – their level of human interest

[1] Tupper, *Riddles,* p. lxxxviii.

has been testified by the amount of literature on the subject – but what I have endeavoured to show, and what I think this study has proved, is that the riddles fulfil the eco-critical principle that 'human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest'.[2] The riddles *are* interested in how their objects are useful to humans, in the issue of utility,[3] but they are also interested in the natural beginnings of these objects, in how they came to be in human hands and in the ethics of their use.

Part of the *beadoweorc* 'battle-work' of this thesis has been arguing against criticism which has asserted the human interests of the riddles to the exclusion of any other, countermanding such assertions as '[Riddle 1] has nothing whatever to do with nature'[4] and '[Riddle 83's] humanity is more discernible than its identity'.[5] In order to read the riddles for their ecological interests, it has been important to negotiate the use of metaphor in the collection, not least because it is the use of metaphor that has generated so much scholarship on the human in the riddles. I have shown how what may be a narrative of human usurpation from a native land, a reflection of Anglo-Saxon social anxieties, also has something to say about attitudes to humanity's use of the resource the riddle is also attempting to portray. In doing so, I have stayed true to Rudd's assertion that the employment of eco-criticism to literature is 'not a case of either/or but of both-and' when it comes to negotiating a text's metaphorical or allegorical habits.[6]

My premise has been to explore the ecology of the Exeter Book riddles from a largely theological perspective. What the riddles depict is a post-lapsarian world of suffering, servitude and exploitation in which the relationship between the human and

[2] Buell, p. 7.
[3] Tupper, *Riddles*, p. lxxxviii.
[4] Mitchell, p. 41.
[5] Nelson, 'Rhetoric of the Riddles', p. 427.
[6] Rudd, p. 11.

non-human is fraught. This reading keeps in mind the fact that what we are dealing with in Anglo-Saxon depictions of nature is a created world, a world shaped by God, as opposed to a more modern perception of the natural world. Eco-theology, the philosophies of which are rarely consulted in literary studies, has been invaluable for conducting a green study of the riddles that takes into account the texts' theological influences, offering principles based on such concepts as *voice* and *resistance* – concepts that are largely absent from eco-criticism.

Together, the dynamic approaches of both eco-criticism and eco-theology, which look for ecological trends across groups of texts, have furnished this study with a valuable interpretive framework for an ecological study of the riddles. By synthesising some of the principles of these groups, and by drawing on the arguments presented in this thesis, I believe we are now in a position to contemplate what a set of ecological principles for the Exeter Book riddles might look like. The list below, then, is an attempt to draw up a list of the governing codes that merit the identification of the riddle collection as 'green':

1. **Sense of place**

   The riddles depict an environment that can resist an anthropocentric world view of place. The riddles depict non-human environments and contemplate nature's nostalgia for a lost Eden.

2. **Voice**

   The riddles depict a non-human world that uses the medium of poetry to express nature's suffering. Nature is able to break through a human-induced silence.

3. Intrinsic value

The riddles resist the anthropocentric attitude to natural resources by considering the intrinsic value, as opposed to simply the use-value, of natural resources.

4. Accountability

The riddles consider humanity's accountability to the environment. Humanity is depicted as a race that can harm or do an injustice to the natural world.

5. Materiality

The riddles refamiliarize human beings with the material world. Concepts of the human and spiritual are set aside in favour of the animal and material. The riddles revel in, or show an appreciation for, what is earthly.

6. Resistance to mastery

The riddles reveal ways in which nature can resist human mastery and post-lapsarian exploitation. The riddles also generate doubts about humanity's intellectual mastery over the natural world.

Before making any evaluative comments, it seems appropriate to draw some further conclusions on these principles and ground them in the studies made in this thesis.

Working with the idea that place is 'foundational for ecological consciousness',[7] I have discussed the riddles for how they depict the non-human environment. I have shown how the riddles are governed by anthropocentric notions of place, but how they are also interested in peripheral, natural places, often depicting

[7] Tolliday, p. 178.

a vivid physical context for their subjects. I gave the example of Riddle 93, which opens with a description of the environment in which the antlered beast once roamed, of streams, fields and slopes. It has become clear that the literal nature of the places themselves can frustrate allegorical interpretations of place; in Chapter 1, I gave the example of Kaske's interpretation of Riddle 60's place as allegorical[8] and argued that Kaske's reading is thwarted by the specificity, the lack of ambiguity, in the details of the rune-staff's initial dwelling place. What has also become clear is that the riddle collection's ecology of place has been influenced by the depiction of place in the elegies. The riddles, I argued, assimilate the relationship between place and nostalgia in the elegies into their depiction of non-human subjects, creating a sense of nostalgia not for the built world that human beings yearn for, but the nurturing natural world from which they came. For example, the tree of Riddle 73 laments its removal from its original dwelling place where it was nourished by soil and rain, whilst the antler of of Riddle 88 expresses sorrow at its removal from a protecting forest. More generally, the riddles collectively depict a nostalgia for a lost Eden, an unspoiled land in which there is no suffering and affliction, a land which *ær wæs / wlitig ond wynsum* 'was formerly beautiful and pleasant' (R. 84, 18a-20a). Place, it is clear, is not a marginal part of the riddles but fundamental both to their design and their underlying ecological principles; the riddle collection shows a clear and thoughtful engagement with natural environments and the experience of environments from a non-human perspective.

My second principle refers to the nature of voice in the Exeter Book riddles. The use of voice in the riddles has been of interest to a number of critics, but has not been discussed eco-critically. I have applied an eco-theological lens to voice that is

[8] Kaske, p. 67.

inspired by the eco-theological principle that claims 'Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice'.[9] I suggested that Riddle 72 reflects nature's biblical groan of travail, breaking the silence imposed by humans on nature whilst also recognising the essence of nature as a non-speaking entity – the ox 'speaks' of its oppression, but it also describes itself as silent. The riddle's depiction of a 'poetically conferred' power of speech, to borrow Denno's phrase,[10] offers a contrast to ox riddle 38 in which a speech act is performed by the human master who makes a statement about the two possible uses the subservient ox has – ploughing or clothing. The riddles' recurring references to speech and silence invite readers to pay attention to the theme of voice in the texts and contemplate the lamentations of those creatures on the periphery of human thought, whilst also reminding readers of the presence of the human voice in the texts.

In their resistance to anthropocentrism the riddles also resist the use-value imposed on the natural world and this has been reflected in the third principle in this conclusion: intrinsic value. I discussed how theology typically describes human resources by how useful they are to their human users and observed that the riddles seem to reflect this habit, describing their subjects by how useful they are to humans. However, I went on to argue that the riddles also consider the intrinsic value of the natural world, giving Riddle 53 as a primary example. In Riddle 53, I suggested, the depiction of the tree's early life, its initial wholeness, stands in contrast to theology's emphasis on the 'end product'. This underlying principle of the riddle collection reflects the first eco-theological principle that 'Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value'.[11] This principle has been invaluable to this study for helping to

[9] The Earth Bible Team, 'Six Ecojustice Principles', p. 24.
[10] Denno, p. 43.
[11] The Earth Bible Team, 'Six Ecojustice Principles', p. 24.

look beyond the anthropocentric notion of nature's utility to observe other more ecological attitudes to the natural world.

This conclusion's fourth principle involves accountability. One of the tenets of eco-poetry is that 'human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation';[12] I have shown that the riddles show an interest in accountability in their depictions of nature's exploitation. The foundations for this interest come from the narrative of the Fall in which humanity, after the original sin, became an exploiter of nature, relinquishing its role as caretaker. In Riddle 77, an oyster is violently ripped apart by human hands and the part that is not needed, its casing, is carelessly thrown away; the main example of accountability I gave is in Riddle 83 in which the subject, ore, is depicted as a natural resource that has been forcibly taken out of the ground by humans. Riddle 83, I argued, uses the violent usurpation of humans from their native land as a metaphor for the removal of ore, suggesting that the removal of ore is itself violent and unjust. I compared the riddle to Job 28, an Old Testament text that has been discussed by eco-theologians for its ecological underpinnings, and showed how the riddle is, in fact, far more ecologically centred than Job; where Job 28 marvels at human ingenuity, Riddle 83 explores the consequences of human ingenuity. The riddles also encourage the alternative to humanity's estrangement from nature, a relationship of unity based on mutual cooperation and shared benefits. I have explored, for example, how the shaping of material mirrors, or helps improve, the shaping of the human spiritual condition. This, I have shown, is not anthropocentrism but an attempt to show an affiliation or affinity between humans and the natural world. This relationship is exemplified in Ambrose's depiction of nature, in which nature

[12] Buell, p. 7.

describes her ideal relationship with the sun as one of shared toil, not mastery and subservience.

The fifth principle of materiality is largely inspired by ecological readings of Bakhtin. I discussed how the carnivalesque is about bringing the material world 'closer to man'[13] and suspending the hierarchical medieval order that upholds the prevailing religious codes, codes that are found in the Old English elegies, for example. The riddles remind humans of their existence in, and necessary interaction with, an earthly world, of the 'fundamental unity of people and nature',[14] and bring what is spiritual and abstract down to a material level. Evidence for this was given in Chapter 3, where I explored Riddle 26's depiction of the making of the Bible. Here, I argued that the riddle inverts a colophon's typical focus on the human and the spiritual to show an interest in the animal and material. I also compared Riddle 26 to Aldhelm's Enigma 59 to highlight the riddle's interest in the carnal and material; where Aldhelm uses the Isidorian tradition of using the ploughing metaphor for writing the Bible, Riddle 26 depicts a violent act against a natural material by human beings.

This thesis has also explored the way the riddles depict nature's resistance to human mastery. This mastery can be in the form of bonds, chains, or other forms of physical dominance, but can also be in the form of intelligence and wisdom. Where humans are typically seen controlling the natural world in the riddle collection, for example the ox of riddle 72, there are occasions where nature is shown to resist such mastery. The riddle collection's diverse responses to human dominance are reflected in my sixth and final principle: resistance to mastery. One of the ways nature can resist human mastery is by a process of 'mutual attrition',[15] whereby the natural world

[13] Gardner, p. 774.
[14] *Ibid*., p. 766.
[15] Hoffman, p. 13.

has ways of causing harm to humans just as humans have ways of causing harm to nature. The example I explored was Riddle 27 in which the nectar, transformed into mead, is able to exact a form of revenge on its human users by taking control of their minds and limbs. In Chapter 7, I went on to discuss how the riddles undermine human wisdom and knowledge; if 'knowing is the quintessential act of assimilation',[16] the riddles show that nature cannot so easily be controlled or assimilated by human minds. I gave the example of Riddle 84, which suggests humans cannot adequately describe the nature of water or understand all the powers of her *cynna*. I also showed how the storm riddles, especially Riddle 1, echo the underlying ecological issues in The Book of Job by suggesting there are many aspects of the created world that humans cannot fully know or hope to control. Riddle 1, I suggested, adopts a similar sardonic address to God in Job to question the audience's knowledge.

What has become apparent here is that the riddle collection's ecological underpinnings are many and diverse. Ultimately, though, their principles all lead back to the interaction of human beings with the everyday world. Humanity is a dominant presence in the collection, depicted (mostly) as a master of its materials, but its mastery comes under scrutiny from the riddle writer(s). As I suggested in my introduction, and what I believe this thesis has shown, is that what the riddles offer most strongly is an ethics of human-nature interaction. The riddles do not offer a romantic view of nature but rather an interrogation of human use and abuse of the created world from nature's point of view. They do not depict nature with the care and attention of a naturalist, but rather with the concern towards the created world of a modern eco-theologian or eco-critic. In her 2002 publication, which seeks an environmental ethics based on '(re)situating humans in ecological terms and non-

[16] Fromm, p. 4.

humans in ethical terms',[17] Plumwood imagines what a modern ethics of spirituality would look like:

> We can say that the pattern of an ecological spirituality should be one that shows friendliness to the earth, envisaged as a place of positive, intrinsic value rather than as a corrupted and instrumentalist way-station to the next life or as a 'vale of tears'. It will be materialist in avoiding spiritual remoteness, aiding awareness of and honouring the material and ecological bases of life, and it will be counter-centric in affirming continuity and kinship for earth others as well as their subjecthood, opacity and agency. It will be dialogical, communicative, open to the play of more-than-human forces and attentive to the ancestral voices of place and of earth.[18]

What is interesting is that, by a large, the Exeter Book riddles fulfil Plumwood's vision. They consider intrinsic value (e.g. Riddle 53), non-human agency (R. 27), and interrogate instrumentalist notions (R. 72); they also avoid 'spiritual remoteness' and 'honour' the 'material bases of life' (R. 26); they are 'open to the play of non-human forces' (Riddles 1, 2 and 3) and pay attention to the ancestral voices of the earth (Riddles 83 and 84). The riddles do not offer solutions to the problems that they interrogate, as modern eco-critics do, but draw attention to the problems and challenge the anthropocentric notions that govern their literary foundations.

This thesis has necessarily had to forgo discussions of a majority of the riddles' sources and analogues. I have only dealt with the sources and analogues where they can shed important light on an aspect of the Exeter Book riddles, for example, when helping to understand the ethics of ox riddle 72 or the depiction of the Bible in Riddle 26. It was never my intention to produce a thorough source study; to do so would have greatly exceeded the limits of this dissertation. It may be a rewarding enterprise,

[17] Plumwood, pp. 8-9.
[18] *Ibid*., p. 229.

however, to apply what has been learnt in this study to the other early riddle collections in future eco-critical studies, whether to shed further light on the Exeter Book riddles or to study the natural world in other early texts beyond the riddles. Part of the reason for drawing up a list of ecological principles is to provide some guidelines that may be consulted when studying other texts, Old English or otherwise, in the future.

In this study I have endeavoured to show how the diverse field of green studies is applicable to the Exeter Book riddles and their depictions of the natural world. The riddles by nature set out to describe non-human entities, providing a literary game for their readers, but they go far beyond the bounds of their genre, beyond the game, to create texts that consider the uses and abuses of the natural world. Green studies in Old English literature has a future, and it is my hope that this present study will provide a useful contribution to this growing field.

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